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ABSTRACT

The emphasis of this issue, reflecting increased demand for accountability, is the importance of teachers gathering data which substantiate pupil growth and present facts about what is going on in English classrooms, especially when teachers are trying different classroom approaches. Articles also discuss student responses to literature, student writing at all educational levels, peer evaluation of student compositions, misconceptions remedial reading students have about themselves, themes of violence in picture books, adolescent literature, teaching "Walden," and the opening three chapters of "The Great Gatsby." (JM)

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EMPHASIS: TEACHERS DOING RESEARCH

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CS 202 623

— Editor's Page —

I know that teachers do good things in their classrooms. They have for years. Quite often, however, these good things get good teachers into trouble. Any procedure which varies very much from the norm is questioned. In general, teachers would be well advised to gather data substantiating pupil growth when trying a different approach in the classroom. Really knowing that something is working requires much more than just a feeling.

Gathering data does not necessarily mean developing a sophisticated research design nor does it require a deep knowledge of statistics. Our EMPHASIS section this month deals with teachers doing research. The several articles offered are written by classroom teachers who wanted facts about what was going on in some English classrooms. In these days of increased demand for accountability, being able to furnish facts about classroom success makes a great deal of sense.

I have submitted my resignation to our new president, Jerome Green. I have enjoyed my tenure as editor and have learned quite a bit about teaching English as well as editing. Any member of the council who would like to be a candidate for this post should contact either the president or the executive secretary. A letter at this point would suffice; be sure to include some personal information pertinent to the qualifications necessary for the job.

Emphasis: Teachers Doing Research

Introduction

Teachers can do research in their own classrooms with their own students, research certain to improve their teaching and to be of interest to other teachers. The six reports in this special Emphasis section of the *English Record* prove this claim.

These six studies could have been done by teachers anywhere with the information, energy, and curiosity of these six teacher-researchers. These studies should initiate the curiosity; they will certainly supply the information anyone would need to do similar studies. And the information turns out to be not very technical—at least not psychometric or statistical. It is information about *the single case study*, the study of the individual student writer or reader. It is information that will enable us to learn what students do and how we can help them by studying in depth single students one at a time. Anyone who is skeptical that this is really research or that we can learn anything useful from it should turn directly to the case for the case study at the end of Audrey Bard's report. Of course, these six reports make the case most convincingly.

These reports fall into two categories:

1. Exploratory case studies (Seaman, Morgan, Goodenow, and Bard). These are case studies of the basic processes of composing and responding to literature.

2. Intervention studies (Reigstad and Watson). These are studies which identify a single problem a student writer is having and then seek to remedy the problem. These are diagnostic-teaching studies which inform us about difficulties many students may be having and suggest ways we can help classroom groups. Unfortunately, very few published instructional materials are based on this sort of careful research.

What is important about these reports is not the findings of the studies, as interesting and suggestive as those may be, but rather the models they offer of classroom teachers doing research. We hope the reports will stimulate other teachers to do similar studies.

Charles Cooper

I Wanted To Know More About Student Response To Poetry

by Audrey Bard

What do students think about when they respond to poetry? We know that in the light of research and our own experience as teachers such response is a highly complex psychological and intellectual process. Nevertheless, we must and we can attempt to understand our students and their responses.

Developing a case study was not the difficult task I once thought it would be. I conducted a simple study to explore this specific question:

> What can we learn about the process of response to poetry by examining the written responses to a variety of poems by a student who is given several different writing tasks?

I wanted some answers which could be translated into implications for improving classroom techniques.

SO I ASKED ONE TO RESPOND

In order to learn more about this process of response I decided to ask a student to write free responses to some poetry. Then I would try to look at these written responses in the way one considers any empirical data.

I shall discuss articles which support the case study approach at a later point in this paper. However, before the reader assumes that one cannot generalize from one case study, let me describe a familiar scene. "Okay, everybody into the cafeteria...Mark the space between the little lines clearly with your #2 lead pencil..." Now if one is trying to discover whether some students like poetry, others are indifferent, and a third group freaks out at the very mention of the word, we may learn something from standardized surveys. Computing 300 tests and dividing the results by 300 may indicate the proportions of classified students. But will mathematics offer any *reasons* for the percentages?

My reasoning was that if I asked a student who neither loved nor hated poetry I'd get somewhat objective results. Don was a high school junior, a minister's son, a member of the band, on the track team, a good sport who stuck to the task of helping me with this research, a superior, curious, and conscientious student—and quite unacquainted with poetry. At our second meeting Don took pains to emphasize this point in our conversation.

> This is the first poetry I've had since 7th or 8th grade...In the 7th grade we read some haiku and we had two weeks to write a poem. [Somewhat pleased] So I wrote one

poem...Oh, I guess we had some narrative poetry in 10th grade. The teacher read it and then we talked about it...This is the first time I've analyzed poetry. [Now, in the best case study procedure I hadn't even *whispered* the word analyze!]

PROCEDURE

Don was asked to write free responses to ten poems, one at a time, over a period of seven weeks. For every response but one he was allowed to choose a different poem from the same collection of fifteen. I had typed these on separate sheets with no author or identifying information, other than the title, in order to avoid stereotypical responses to poems by well-known poets. Specifically, these were his directions:

DIRECTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO THE FIRST TWO POEMS

1. From this group of poems, choose a poem which attracts your attention in some way.
2. By the time of the next session read the poem carefully and write down your thoughts about it.
3. You may look up words or expressions which are unfamiliar to you, but please do not talk with anyone about the poem. Write down your own ideas, and try to write at least one page.
4. Please write clearly, and do not copy over unless what you have written is so personal that you don't want me to read it. Don't worry about spelling or whether your writing is perfect.
5. It will be best if you read, think about the poem, and write a response several times between sessions. When you start a new response, draw a line under the last one.
6. We will talk about your responses at each session, but it is important that you try to write down what you wish to say.

Each time we met we would discuss Don's written response and the poem itself. It seemed important to give him immediate feedback on his responses and to share insights, difficulties, and enthusiasm. I also promised to give him copies of the poems and return his responses. It was only fair that he have some tangible evidence of his efforts.

I must explain here that I have included in this report some of the comments he made in our conversations. An increasing number of studies have made use of tape recorders to great advantage. In my case study, however, it was not feasible to use a tape recorder; and this, you may agree, is very often the situation in school. Sometimes I took hurried notes and then tried to expand them soon afterwards. Most of the time, using case work procedure, I simply made a disciplined effort to remember what was said and then dashed off and wrote down what I could recall.

An encouraging word may be said about this technique, sloppy as it may sound. Listening and hearing what students say should be part of the teacher's growing repertoire of talents. It's quite vital, and we don't

do enough of it. I found, to my chagrin, that I often remembered my own comments but failed to remember Don's. Nevertheless, some of his remarks were carefully recorded, and I will differentiate between his written responses and spoken comments whenever they are quoted.

Some brief comments on the five poems Don did *not* choose are indicative. When he had selected the tenth poem, I asked him to tell me why he had not chosen the other five. Two simple poems, one on hunting and one about Christmas presents, he dismissed with these comments:

> They're too short...They say one thing...consequently there's not too much to analyze...They might have been fun to do...sort of plain, forthright...The author might really be saying something.

Here Don could have written about personal experiences or opinions about hunting and Christmas presents, but that was not *his* style of free response.

In regard to the soliloquy from *Hamlet*, "To Be or Not to Be":

> That's harder to push as poetry and should be read in the context of the play...I know the story...It's not the language that bothered me.

Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

> There's not too much to write about except the way the poet paints his picture.

Carl Sandburg's "Buyers and Sellers":

> I don't know. I've already done something like this in "Ever a Seeker."...It's social commentary.

The tenth poem he chose was Suckling's "Why So Pale and Wan."

> It's a different style...I want a good selection.

Don seemed to be saying that he wanted to be able to respond to a variety of poems and that he wanted them to be of some consequence. He appeared to be a meat and potatoes man who also enjoyed salads and desserts. He also said, much to my relief, in our first conversation, "This is a good group of poems."

You will notice in the instructions that I asked Don to write at least a page for each response. His completed responses averaged just over one page in length, and, as you will observe, they were not ramblings to fill the page but honest efforts to respond. Don was instructed to respond several times to each poem because I felt that some depth of response might develop. The data indicates that this generally was the case. The average number of responses was exactly two. I had wished for more but did not pressure him on this aspect of the study.

I should also report that Don was never fully prepared for our sessions. He always wanted more time to write at the last minute, and I always granted him the time and the privacy he needed. Since his participation in this study was completely voluntary, this procedure was not unreasonable.

The instructions did not call for what is termed free-association response. An excellent example of such a study is the one by Sharon Silkey and Alan C. Purves. ("What Happens When We Read a Poem." JOURNAL OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION, 7,[July, 1973], pp. 63-72). Miss Silkey kept a running diary of her responses to one poem. These ranged from personal remarks and ramblings to more technical analysis. The free-association response is an excellent technique, but it does require a certain level of training and experience in responding which I felt Don did not possess. Don was simply told to "read the poem carefully and write down your thoughts about it."

Don's first choice of poems to which to respond was "Ballad of the Landlord," by Langston Hughes. Notice the intensity of involvement but the lack of any personal remarks about how he (Don) has felt oppressed. His expressed feelings appear to be those of sympathy and not of empathy. I hasten to add that *the expression of such personal feelings and experiences should not be suppressed in student responses to literature*. It simply was not Don's style to include them. This was his first completed response.

Sat. A.M.

When I finished this poem I really hated the landlord. When I looked at the end and saw all those headlines of what the landlord did to the tenant after he treated him badly, I really felt angry at him.

Sat. P.M.

I knew from 'member in the 3d line that this person was poor and probably black. Another line that sticks out as being noticed by me is "He's trying to ruin the government and overturn the land." This tells a lot about the plight of the poor tenants. How they are kept down by society in the name of law and order.

Sat. Night

The author's sympathies definately lie with the tenant in my opinion. I feel that he wants the reader to know what it's like to be oppressed.

Sun. A.M.

This poem is called a ballad because it is written so that the reader has a story to follow. But in the process of the story the author tells us what he feels is wrong with his subject.

I do not know, and perhaps even Don didn't know exactly, why he, a white student in a white suburban neighborhood, chose this as the first poem to which to respond. He had spent at least ten minutes reading over the others before choosing it. He had no trouble in understanding this poem, and in our conversation he commented that old people are also often powerless to improve their living conditions. The fact that he mentions the form of the poem, the ballad, is also significant, and I shall comment on this a bit later on.

The second poem, or poems, which Don chose was a page of six haiku poems. I suggested that he chooose two of the six from which to respond. The first, by Bashio, described someone's comments about mosquitoes. This was Don's complete response.

Wed. Night

"The best I have..." It took me a while to develop an understanding of what was being said in this poem. The way I interpret it is that he is poor and his living conditions are so bad that the only thing he can offer to a visitor is the thankfulness that the mosquitoes aren't larger. In a way, I think this person is taking an optimistic view of his plight. I was left with a feeling that the speaker thinks on the bright side. After all, he is saying that the mosquitoes could be bigger.

You will recall that Don studied haiku in seventh grade. Perhaps he chose these poems because the form was familiar to him. In any case, note that he had no trouble interpreting the meaning and the *mood* of the poem.

Thurs.

"Thinking comfortable thoughts..." I feel that this poem is remarkable in that it creates such a complete picture of the mood of the people in so little words. I think I have somewhat of an idea of what the people are feeling. It may be after a hard day's work in the hot sun and after the evening meal. Everything is done for them, and they can sit back and reflect over the day's accomplishments and feel secure with one another doing it.

In our conversation about these poems I explained the form of haiku because Don had expressed an interest and was trying to remember the seventeen-syllable pattern. Note Don's reference to mood in his response. In conversation he said:

They're all different. Some are just a mood or an idea. Others seem to tell a whole story...In the one about the child told to grind corn, you can just *see* the mother telling the child...

One might not consider "picturing" to be a very technical term in the interpretation of poetry, but in a study by Terry Phillips the term picturing is used to indicate this supplying of additional detail, the extending of a poem, by a reader ("Poetry in the Junior School." ENGLISH IN EDUCATION [Britain], 5, [Winter, 1971], pp. 51-62). This study was conducted with eleven-year-olds, but who among us mature readers does not engage in just this sort of picturing? Phillips believes that unless one can picture in this fashion, one is not ready to evaluate a given poem. In this case, Don was able to picture and then was able to express his appreciation for the poet's ability to compress detail.

DEAR CAPTAIN

For Don's response to the third, fourth, and fifth poems I made just one essential change in the directions.

1. Read the poem. Imagine that you are listening carefully to what the "speaker" in the poem is saying to you.
2. Then write an informal letter in reply to this speaker. Write down anything you wish to say. If you have questions about the poem, write these as part of your letter. Since you do not know the speaker's name, make one up.
3. It will be best if you read, think about the poem, and write several times before the next session. When you start a new response, just write, "P.S...

4. You may look up words or expressions which are unfamiliar to you, but please do not talk with anyone about the poem. Write down your own ideas, and try to write at least one page.

5. Please write clearly, and do not copy it over unless what you have written is so personal that you don't want me to read it. Don't worry about spelling or whether your writing is perfect.

6. We will talk about your responses at each session, but it is important that you try to write down what you wish to say.

After reading the instructions, Don poured over the remaining thirteen poems and decided on John Masefield's "Sea-Fever." In doing so he said, "I think I'll change the pace." Later, when I asked him what he had meant by this he said, "The haiku was more humorous. 'Sea Fever' is more serious, more literate." I didn't press him for a definition of literate. This was his complete response. The slashes and numbers are mine, for a purpose soon to be disclosed.

Saturday P.M.

Dear Captain,

You really gave a good description of what it is like to live by the sea.[1]/ I can recall some experiences I have of the sea and its surroundings,[2]/ and they resemble in the mood and impressions they left on me, the same things you talked about.[3]/

Sun. A.M.

P.S. In the third line you spoke of the 'grey mist' and a 'grey dawn breaking.'[4]/ These two images are best recalled in my mind.[5]/

You spoke of the part of the sea that is known only to the sailor.[6]/ however there are a couple of things I don't understand.[7]/ What is the 'gull's way' and the 'whale's way'?[8]/ I guess they are the way of the 'vagrant gypsies.'[9]/ I mean they lead the kind of life where they don't need to have a goal to work towards all the time.[10]/

I think your second stanza is nice because of the imagery it gives me.[11]/

P.S. I like your ending.[12]/ What better way to end the adventure of sailing than 'a quiet sleep' after a hard long day.[13]/ Before I close I'd like to say something about the second to last line.[14]/ I feel it captures a certain picture of what the sailor's life is like.[15]/ All he needs besides the 'windy day with the white clouds flying' is to sit around with fellow sailors and share their tales of adventure.[16]/ Now that I think about it, you really have told a lot about the sailor's life.[17]/

Sincerely,
Don

I wonder what a less-experienced teen-ager might include in a response. We must not squelch this kind of personal experiencing in student responses, because it shows that the writer has caught the mood of the poem. In his study of the response of fifteen-year-olds, Barnes notes the importance of a student's expressing personal experience before he can evaluate literature. (Douglas Barnes, Peter Churley, and Christopher Thompson, "Group Talk and Literary Response." ENGLISH EDUCATION [Britain], 5, [Winter, 1971], pp. 63-76).

Don could relate directly through personal experience. He could picture again the "grey mist" and the "grey dawn breaking." Then he

congratulated the poet on his ability to tell "about the sailor's life."

Something new had been added to this response. He was *asking* questions. True, he answered his own questions, but he was *asking questions*.

Now to explain the slashes and numbering in the last response. You will note that they divide Don's response into units containing a principal clause and any subordinate clause or nonclausal structure attached to or embedded in it. A compound sentence will contain more than one unit. Alan C. Purves and Victoria Rippere refer to these units as *statements* in their monograph *Elements of Writing about a Literary Work: A Study of Response to Literature* (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968). This monograph describes a logical and helpful technique for a very searching analysis of student writing. This work should be readily accessible to every teacher of English.

My purpose here is to indicate what I will call "sorting statements," using the term sorting as described in the study by Barnes previously cited. This sorting is an expressed attempt to understand words and phrases. In Don's response to "Sea-Fever" there were four of these sorting statements (7,8,9, and 10). If you will refer back to the poem "Ballad of the Landlord," you will find no sorting statements. Don was quite definite about his interpretation and understanding of the poem. At least he did not refer to anything he did not clearly understand.

The next poem Don chose to respond to was "Tourist." He had some trouble with this poem written by an Indian teen-ager, Ray Benally, in the voice of an old Indian who has seen white tourists swarming over what he considers to be junk. Note that Don had difficulty determining who "the speaker" was.

Tues. Night

Dear Speaker,

The first question that came into my mind was what is the significance of the word 'broken' in the ninth line?[1]/ Also, why are those particular items associated with this word?[2]/ Another question I had refers to the phrase 'plain crossing people.'[3]/ I believe that this refers to the early pioneers who moved West during the nineteenth century.[4]/ The 'old bleached horse heads' and 'goat heads' are the remnants of their history,[5]/ and these are the things which the tourist considers 'junk'.[6]/ Because the tourist is looking for the authentic trappings of the pioneer legacy it is ironic that he instead buys things marked 'made in Japan' and stops at the sign: 'Indian items sold at great prices.'[7]/

P.S. Another thing I wanted to ask you is what are the 'little chuckles' you mentioned in the last stanza.[8]/ My guess is that you are laughing at the tourists for their buying the junk and placing no value on the genuine things.[9]/ One thing I would like to tell you about is the moods I felt you expressing.[10]/ In the first stanza, I felt that you were being almost humorous in your descriptions while the second stanza is much more serious.[11]/ The word which comes to my mind is reflection.[12]/ Before I close I would

like to add one more clue that I got in determining that you are referring to the pioneers.[13] You listed people as one of the items under 'broken'[14] The pioneers weren't always successful.[15] But they are a long way from the present American tourist.[16]

Don and I started our discussion of this poem with his correct interpretation of "plains crossing people." Then I asked him who he thought the speaker was. His hesitant answer was, "An Indian?" Soon after he understood who the speaker was he said, "This is a good poem. I wish I had been able to do more with it." Yielding to the temptation to "set him straight" I explained that the title probably confused him as to who was speaking. The importance of point of view also became apparent. The Indian could see nothing of value in old American pioneer relics, but white tourists would consider them part of their heritage. Unfortunately, they could not always tell the difference between imported junk and the real thing.

In my opinion, the bulk of this response to "Tourist" is comprised of sorting statements. One through eight are, and he returns to his first questions again in units 13 and 14. However, note that after all this puzzlement he could still compose the original comparison in units 15 and 16.

Don's next choice of response was the small poem "Harlem" from Langston Hughes's "Lenox Avenue Mural." In a later conversation he said that although he had written all of the response at one time, "The poem had been going over and over through my mind." He also said, "I know who the author is." It's from *A Raisin in the Sun*." Indeed, it does appear in the front of the paperback edition (Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: Signet, 1961). Note that Don addressed his letter, "Dear Mr. Younger," the protagonist of the play.

Wed. P.M.

Dear Mr. Younger,

I would like to start out by saying that from the title, I'm sure you're talking about the Black man. He is faced with discrimination and prejudice from the society in which he lives. I think that you have captured the plight of the Black man living in Harlem. His hope can so easily 'dry up' and turn to despair when he is knocked down by society. Or his despair can fester inside of him making him angry. I like the word fester in the fourth line. I think that it gives a good description of what must go on inside of someone who is shuned and put down and turned away by white society. I like the use of the 'syrupy sweet' to describe the kind of reaction to prejudice where the black man plays the part of the 'dumb nigger' who is always gentle and ready to bow down before the white man. You also mention that the deferred dream can become a 'heavy load' which I assume is the burden that the black who settles for less than he is capable of becoming must carry. To conclude, I would like to ask if you were making a prediction for society when you wrote the last line? It seems to me that the black man should have every reason to want to fight or do something to make his plight known, but on the positive side maybe society and of course every white man individually can change before this is necessary.

This was truly an insightful response. It was also written as a single response in about ten or fifteen minutes—after Don had had a big band

exchange weekend with concerts and out-of-town guests in his home. Of course I told him that his response was excellent, in addition to explaining to this budding musician the nature of "Lennox Avenue Mural," a sort of musical session containing poems of different lengths, moods, and rhythms.

Next we talked about the term "explode." I said that I thought it could also refer to *any* sudden action, such as the actions taken by each of the main characters in *Raisins in the Sun*.
Then Don said:

> Oh, I forgot to write something down. I noticed something in the structure of the poem. It starts off with a five-line part and then goes to three, then two, and then just one line to climax.

To be candid, *I* hadn't noticed that! Later on I asked him if that truly was his very own observation and he assured me that it was. This confirms what Squire found in his study, *The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stores* (Urbana, Illinois; National Council of Teachers of English, 1964). There is a high positive correlation between the percentage of responses (statements) of self-involvement and literary judgement. That is, following deep involvement in a piece of literature, a student is more willing and able to reflect on its literary value. Again, note that Don's style of response is one of understanding and sympathy. He makes a few personal references. Nevertheless, he has been deeply involved with this poem, and after this period of involvement he was able to make a profound observation on the poet's style. You will recall, now, that Don made similar evaluative statements in responses to "Ballad of the Landlord," the haiku, and "Sea-Fever."

DIALOGUE WITH THE SPEAKER

The only time that I chose the poem to which Don was to respond was for the sixth response. The poem, another by the Indian teen-ager, Ray Benally, was entitled "Ruins." It described the site of ancient cliff dwellers in the American West, and it was written years before the trouble at Wounded Knee. These were the directions which I gave to Don.

1. Read the poem. Imagine that you are listening carefully to what the speaker in the poem is saying to you.

2. Then write down what you might say to this person if you could actually talk to him/her and how you think this person would answer you. In other words, write a dialogue or conversation about this poem. Your dialogue might start something like this:

Student: Excuse me, but you seem to have a special interest in these ruins.
Speaker: They belong to my people.

The following is Don's complete response to this poem. What I interpreted as wind-eroded rocks near the cave dwellings Don interpreted as tombstones in a white man's cemetery. He caught the mood of death and ruins, however, and tried to make a connection with recent Indian history.

Sat. P.M.

I: Excuse me, but you seem to have a special interest in these ruins.[1]/

Hero: They belong to my people.[2]/

I: Where are these ruins located?[3]/

Speaker: Where my people live, perhaps, but who can say?[4]/

I: Let me ask something that maybe you can answer:[5]/ What is the significance of the separation of the main part of the poem into two stanzas?[6]/

Sun. A.M.

Speaker: How do you mean?[7]/

I: I mean that the first stanza might relate to the ruins of the white man, that is, all those ornamental tombstones found in cemeteries[8]/ and the second stanza might relate to the Indian's.[9]/ Is that possible?[10]/

Speaker: I suppose my poem could be interpreted that way.[11]/ But perhaps you should ask me more questions.[12]/

I: Fine. You seem to have expressed anger in the last line.[13]/ Is this anger a response to what the white man has done to your people?[14]/

Speaker: Yes. The white man has exploited my people's culture for profit.[15]/ But he has done more.[16]/ He has violently suppressed us throughout the last century, and even today.[17]/

I: Oh, then perhaps your poem relates to the story of Wounded Knee.[18]/ But tell me how does the Indian feel that these ruins of Wounded Knee served his cause?[19]/

Speaker: The ruins will remind the world of the tragedy that occured there.[20]/

At least half of the statements in this response were "sorting statements." It seems that one of the advantages of the letter and the dialogue type of response is that it encourages the student to ask questions which will clarify the meaning of the poem. In the Barnes study previously cited, the fifteen-year-olds spent much of their discussion ironing out just such problems when they were alone in their small discussion groups. It is quite evident that we must allow the students to do this sorting in a setting where they feel secure. Generally, they will not expose themselves to ridicule in class discussion, and we simply must not resort to doing all the clarifying ourselves. After all, there can be more than one interpretation of certain lines, and we must enable our students to learn to interpret for themselves.

Unfortunately, space will not permit my recording all ten of Don's responses. I asked him to write dialogues in response to poems six, seven, and eight. For the last two responses I allowed him to choose the form of response. The tenth was similar to his first two responses, and the ninth a letter.

I asked Don to write down a final response to the total process of responding to the ten poems. The following is his complete, one-page response.

Sat.

One of the most important things that I feel responding to poetry gave me was a chance to practice the skill of writing. At times it was a struggle to try to think of

things to write, but the fact that you wanted to see everything I wrote, the first time, forced me to think about what I wanted to say and try to make it as clear as possible. In many of the poems the meaning was not readily apparent, and so it was necessary for me to decide what I could respond, style, vocabulary, set-up, etc., before I could write about the ideas the author was really trying to present.

Another point I would like to discuss is which method I liked best. Letter writing was probably the easiest because you could just talk and write down things as they came to you. A dialogue was fascinating at times because you had to think of the way the author would respond to your questions which you yourself didn't understand.

The poem I liked best was "Harlem," by Langston Hughes. I feel I could understand the meaning of each of the phrases used by Hughes. However, in each of the poems I felt I could get some experience in analyzing and understanding the ideas expressed through poetry and as a result learned about poetry in general.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

1. Generally we do not demand to see a first draft of student writing, but for purposes of research it is most enlightening. Puzzlement was expressed in the first statements of at least five of Don's ten complete responses. We must, therefore, allow students, either in the security of small group discussions or in their written responses, to express this need for "sorting." Ideally, there should be no such thing as a "dumb question" or a "dumb remark."

2. It would appear that an informal letter to the speaker of a poem may be a useful technique in encouraging student response to poetry. The dialogue, obviously, should be reserved for occasions when the student is secure in his understanding of a poem.

3. Students will need more time to interpret one poem than they will need for another, and the teacher cannot always tell which will be the easiest. Likewise, the time factor will vary from student to student. If our objective is to teach students to interpret poetry on their own, we must not force them to depend on snap judgments or on what is said by the teacher or other students.

4. In the last paragraph of his remarks about the study Don implied that he could learn something from his mistakes and from poems which were difficult for him. We must not insult students by asking them to respond only to the poetry which is easily understood. Furthermore, most of it should be meaningful, not just "fun."

5. It should be axiomatic that students not be asked to evaluate poetry which they cannot interpret. The findings in the present study as well as those of Phillips, Barnes, and Squire support the hypothesis that if a student understands a poem and gets personally involved with it, he will, of his own accord, begin to evaluate it.

6. The valuable techniques developed by Squire and by Purves and Rippere for the analysis of student response have been given but cursory attention in this article. Teachers will profit by further study and application of these techniques.

7. We must use such case studies not only to generalize but to help individual students. Perhaps Don could be encouraged to include more personal experience in his responses. Perhaps, somewhere along the way, he got the impression that the mature reader doesn't do this.

8. We must get to know students better by listening to their comments and analyzing their written responses using more systematic techniques.

9. Don expressed his appreciation for "a chance to practice the skill of writing." We must encourage students to practice this skill in many ways, such as the writing of personal journals and the writing of many responses from which they could choose the best for the teacher or fellow students to read.

THE CASE FOR THE CASE STUDY

As important as large-scale studies may be, we must not overlook the values of case studies of small groups or individuals. Support for this opinion comes from without as well as within the discipline of teaching English. The participant-observer method used in the present study is described in *Patterns of Discovery in the Social Studies*, by Paul Diesing. (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1971, p. 6). Diesing writes of "holistic" studies, which refer to theories about "whole societies, communities, persons, organizations, groups, or processes....A holistic theory is an appropriate guide for participant observation because it continually reminds the observer that his particular, immediate observation must be understood and interpreted by reference to a larger background" (p. 204). Diesing reminds us, therefore, that we are dealing with whole persons who are responding to poetry. If we ask, we may learn more about how one particular whole person responds to poetry.

Don's remarks and written responses in the present study are empirical data. In her article, "The Case Study Method," Hedda Bolgar speaks of the case study based on carefully recorded observation (Chapter II, pp. 28-29, Benjamin B. Woolman, ed., *Handbook of Clinical Psychology*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1965). "The case study method...is essentially exploratory in nature: it focuses on the individual, and it aims primarily at discovering and generating hypotheses" (p. 28).

Of course, there is the problem of generalizing from one case. Students should not be encouraged to put more personal experience into their responses if this is the only way they respond.

It would appear that if one is not too certain about what he's looking for—in this case, the very nature of response—the case study is an appropriate method of investigation. The studies cited in this article, those by Squire, Silkey and Purves, Phillips, and Barnes, are but a few of the excellent case studies available for our use.

Let us now return to our original subject, which, you will remember, is not just poetry, but a student's response to poetry. Norman

Holland, known for his psychoanalytical approach to response to literature, speaks to this in his book, *Poems in Persons*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973). The fundamental factor in response, Holland argues, is a reader's personal style. "Because this is the fundamental factor, the aim of an experiment in literary response...must be to elicit as much as possible of a subject's personal style, not to slough it off in statistical averages" (p. 158).

Thus the empirical data gathered in case studies can be used to help us to understand an individual and his responses, and it can (with care) be generalized to a larger group of students.

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ONE GIRL READING: A Case Study in Response to Literature

by Carol Goodenow

INTRODUCTION

One valuable result of the social and political turmoil of the sixties and early seventies has been the attempt on the part of many educators to rethink the curriculum, to make school subjects more obviously relevant to students' interests and needs, and—especially in social studies and the language arts—to include materials more pertinent to the lives of groups too long underrepresented in standard texts. Articles on Native American, Black, Chicano, and women's literature have appeared in recent professional journals. Panels and conferences have been set up at both the local and national level to try to broaden the English curriculum not only by including more balanced views—more literature presenting the experience of different groups, more literature by authors other than white men, more rounded and complex ethnic and female characters—but also by calling attention to stereotyping in literature where it does exist.

Much of this effort rests on the assumption that the literature considered in the classroom does have its psychological and social effect upon young people, and that one of the purposes of teaching literature is to help students develop a fuller understanding of themselves and others, a fuller appreciation of the diversity of human experience. In particular, the introduction of material concerning ethnic groups and women, it is hoped, will reduce stereotyped thinking in all students and will foster the self-esteem of those groups so often neglected. This hope, in turn, is based on the belief that literature, like other media, can at times set up a process of symbolic identification. That is, though much of a child's self-concept comes from his identification with and imitation of his parents and other influential people in his life, at least some of the time and to some small extent his behavior and attitudes can be influenced by the television and movies he sees and the books he reads. The exact nature and extent of this symbolic identification is a matter of dispute, particularly with respect to the child's sense of gender identity. Freud, for example, felt that the child, for complex psychosexual reasons, formed a strong identification with the same-sex parent at an early age and that the sex-role attitudes and behaviors appearing at adolescence were enormously, if not quite immutably, influenced by these early identifications. More recent psychologists, particularly the social learning theorist Walter Mischel and Lawrence Kohlberg, a

follower of Piaget's "cognitive-developmental" psychology (both of whom discuss their views in Eleanor Maccoby's *The Development of Sex Differences*, Stanford University Press 1966) assume that the child is more open to influence with respect to his sex-role as well as other attitudes toward himself and others in later life. Thus, even in adolescence and beyond, the teacher can exert some positive influence in developing a healthy self-concept and in reducing stereotyped thinking about the self and others.

Because literature is so often concerned with feelings and attitudes, the English classroom becomes a particularly appropriate forum for this sort of influence. In fact, one recent study, Mary Beaven's "Responses of Adolescents to Feminine Characters in Literature" (*Research in the Teaching of English*, Spring, 1972) found that in 870 responses of secondary school students to a questionnaire, 35% of the girls and 29% of the boys had been sufficiently influenced by a book they had read in an English class to say that they had changed their thinking or behavior. When the books were those read on their own, 46% of the girls and 34% of the boys said they had been so influenced. Although we have no way of knowing how the students interpreted "influence" or to what extent their thinking or behavior actually changed, it seems logical to assume that at least some modest change in attitude can be brought about in some students by the reading of literature. This change, of course, is rarely as much as is sometimes claimed or hoped, but it does exist.

The Beaven study went on to find that most of the students could not point to any female characters that they wanted to be like or that they would want for their mothers. Furthermore, when asked to list the five fictitious characters they most admired, even the girls listed more male than female characters (773 males listed compared to 475 females). For the boys, the most admired characters comprised 824 men and only 65 women! When asked if they had experienced a strong identification with one of the characters that they had read about in an English class, those girls who claimed any such identification listed more men than women (113 to 79) while boys listed 139 strong identifications with male characters and only 5 with female. In her conclusion, Beaven stressed the need for more, and more varied and admirable, female characters in the literature presented in English classrooms. If literature is to influence the attitudes and behaviors of young people, it must include characters with whom they can identify.

In the past few years, attempts have been made on the part of many publishers to remedy this situation. Sections or units on women have been included in some standard literature anthologies. Poetry collections, such as Laura Chester and Sharon Barba's *Rising Tides* (Washington Square Press, 1973) and Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey's *Psyche* (Dell, 1973) have appeared, as has Mary Anne Ferguson's anthology, primarily of short stories, *Images of Women in Literature* (Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

Despite the need for such material, and the importance of including literature by and about women in the classroom, can we assume that the inclusion of this literature will have, by itself, any effect? Are stories, poems, novels, and biographies about women really influential, and if so, what kind of influence do they have? Are we justified in hoping that stories with varied and unstereotyped female characters will actually help to break down stereotypes about women? While studies like Beaven's consider the expressed views and ideas of a number of students, they can, of necessity, take into account only the most conscious reactions to literature and, of necessity, deal with the average, the percentage, rather than with the fuller and more complete responses to literature that occur in individual students. The teacher interested in the kinds of problems encountered by readers attempting to deal with new ways of looking at characters or situations will find the detailed responses of individual students reacting to specific works of literature more helpful. Indeed, two recent books, Norman Holland's *Poems in Persons* (Norton, 1973) and David Bleich's *Readings and Feelings* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1974) focus at least in part on looking closely at a few readers reading and on the ways in which the readers' own psychological makeup helped to organize their responses to and interpretation of various pieces of literature. Both assume that the reader's own personality, what he brings to literature in knowledge, experience, and emotion, must be taken into account in the teaching of literature. In fact, to Bleich,

> All people, young and old, think about themselves most of the time and think about the world in terms of themselves. (p. 4)

Students are most motivated to read and think about literature by

> the awareness that reading can produce new understanding of oneself—not just a moral here and a message there, but a genuinely new conception of one's values and tastes as well as one's prejudices and learning difficulties. (p. 3)

How can we best use the students' overwhelming concern with themselves and their identities, particularly their concern with sexuality and sex roles, to further the teaching of literature? Conversely, how can literature help students sort out their own thoughts and feelings, develop self-esteem and respect for others, and reduce stereotyped thinking with respect to what it means to be male or female? A first step, obviously, is the selection of literature that includes many varied and admirable female as well as male characters. After this, however, we must become aware of the difficulties students face in understanding and identification.

The responses of an individual student to particular literary works dealing with women, though it cannot tell us how all or even most students react, may help in revealing what problems are liable to occur when adolescents are faced with complex or unstereotypical characters. The following study is an attempt, looking at one girl reading, to assess these responses.

In his 1964 National Council of Teachers of English Research Report, *The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories*, James Squire found that, among other sources of difficulty in literary interpretation, adolescent students often misinterpreted short stories because they relied heavily on stock responses and on "happiness binding," a tendency to "assume, infer, and hope for the best" (Squire, p. 41). These responses, in fact, were largely uncorrelated with the students' intelligence and reading ability.

> Stereotyped reactions, happiness bindings, and other misleading or distorted reactions are found as often among intelligent, able readers as are incisive, penetrating observations. (p. 51)

A more specific purpose of the present study, then, was to see whether, after several years of public discussion, media coverage, and controversy over women's roles, an average student was less inclined to see female characters in literature in a stereotyped way.

THE STUDY

No student is ever quite "typical," but I wanted a case study subject who fell within the normal range of ability and asked Joan, a fifteen year old high school sophomore and "C" student, to help. I did not have access to her school records. We met for seven sessions of from thirty to sixty minutes each during the second semester of her sophomore year at a local all-girls parochial school. Before each session, she was given a duplicated copy of a short story, asked to read it carefully and to write a one-page "response" to the story. The content of this response was deliberately left vague, though Joan was encouraged to discuss whatever struck her or interested her about the story and to include her emotional reactions as well as her thoughts. When she had finished the story, we met for a taped interview session in which she discussed her reaction to the story and her understanding of it. Though we usually began with very general and open-ended questions, I often called attention to specific scenes or passages in an attempt to elicit a response and to assess the ways in which she interpreted different sections of the story in building an understanding of the whole.

All but one of the stories were chosen from Mary Anne Ferguson's *Images of Women in Literature* and were selected because each contained at least one significant character who represented a woman in a stereotypical woman's role. For example, some of the stories included a mother, an old maid, a "sex object," and a submissive wife. The stories, varying in length and difficulty, were, in order, Ernest Gaines' "The Sky is Gray," Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "A New England Nun," Irwin Shaw's "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses," Tillie Olsen's "Tell Me a Riddle," Sally Benson's "Little Woman," John Updike's "A and P" (from *Pigeon Feathers*, Alfred A Knopf, 1959), and William Dean Howell's "Editha." No critical or interpretive comments were included in the text Joan read, and she was never informed of my own particular interest in women characters. Instead, she was simply told that the study

was designed to see how one high school student responded to a series of short stories, and that I was not so much interested in "correct" answers as in her own personal reactions and thoughts.

An easy-going, friendly, and athletic fifteen-year old, Joan lives in a middle to upper-middle class neighborhood in Buffalo. She is the third child and only daughter of a close, active family. Both of her parents work, her father as an insurance investigator and her mother as a newspaper staff writer. Like her three brothers, Joan attended a public elementary school and then a parochial high school. Unlike her brothers, she had some difficulty in keeping up with the college bound classes to which she was originally assigned during her freshman year, and transferred to another high school that permitted her to take some secretarial courses as well as standard academic subjects. Throughout the study, Joan was pleasant and cooperative, and she seemed quite pleased to have been asked to participate.

THE RESULTS

Joan's written responses to the short stories were uniformly cautious and generally uninformative. In almost every case, she included a sentence or two expressing her general emotional reaction to the story. "Editha" was "heart-warming," "The Sky is Gray" was "very interesting," "A New England Nun" was "hard to follow." Most of these written pieces, averaging about 250 words each, were devoted to simple explanation of what happened in the plot, sometimes accompanied with quotes from the story.

The interviews revealed more of Joan's thinking. The first and most obvious result of the discussions was that Joan indicated that several of the stories were simply beyond her reading ability. In fact, two of the stories we finally used were substitutions for more difficult ones selected earlier. Unlike some of Squire's students, who demonstrated an "apparent unwillingness to admit the existence of comprehension problems" (p. 39), Joan on several occasions confessed that she had failed to make sense of a story. This was particularly true of "Tell Me a Riddle," the longest and most difficult of the lot. Tillie Olsen's story concerns an old woman, Hannah, dying slowly of cancer and realizing with bitterness that she has spent too much of her life playing out the stereotyped roles of wife and mother. The dialogue is written, in part, in a modified Yiddish syntax, and as the story progressed and Hannah's health deteriorated the story included more and more fragments of thoughts, disjointed snatches of conversations, and modified stream of consciousness sequences.

Joan took almost three weeks to finish this one, putting it down and restarting. In fact, she seemed not so much to finish at all as to give up. It is significant, perhaps, that this is the only story for which Joan "forgot" to write a response. Though she understood a few facts of the story—that Hannah was dying, was partially deaf, argued with her husband, visited

her children—she completely missed several others. Joan thought, for example, that Hannah had been pleased to visit her daughter and grandchildren when, in fact, she had not. She also failed to understand the issue of an argument early in the story between Hannah and her husband in which the two were quarreling over whether or not to sell their house and move to a retirement community. Joan objected to the length of the story, its "dullness," and to the fact that so much of the story was conversation; yet she had liked "The Sky is Gray," which was almost as long, and "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses," which was almost totally conversation. It seems quite likely that, in addition to the real difficulties presented by the syntax and form of the story, Joan simply found it impossible to empathize or identify with an old and dying woman, especially one whose attitude toward her children was so cool. In this respect, she is quite similar to Squire's students, for whom the "Age of the character...seems to influence the degree of self-involvement." (p. 36)

Further evidence of this lack of involvement with older characters can be seen in Joan's response to "A New England Nun," another difficult story for her. In this story, Louisa, after waiting patiently for fourteen years for her fiance, Joe Dagget, to make his fortune in Australia, finds herself, upon his return, discomfitted by his clumsiness and uneasy at the thought of the changes that marriage will bring to the orderly and placid life to which she has grown accustomed. It is with real relief that Louisa overhears a conversation in which Joe declares his love for a younger neighbor, Lily, even while he affirms his staunch loyalty and sense of duty to Louisa. Now Louisa can set him free in good conscience and return to her own settled and serene ways.

After reading the story, Joan expressed dissatisfaction similar to that she had felt with "Tell Me a Riddle."

> It was hard to follow. The story was kind of too explanatory, too much in detail. They could have made it much shorter.

> This is killing me. I hate to keep going back. I didn't understand a lot of the words.

Significantly, though, when Joan was asked to locate specific examples of words she didn't understand, she could find none.

> I missed some of the story. I just couldn't get it. I got to the end and just thought "What happened?"

Despite repeated references in the story to Louisa's misgivings about her impending marriage and to her sense of relief when she ended her engagement, Joan failed to make any more sense of the story's conclusion than just that Louisa and Joe didn't get married.

> I got the impression it was a pretty sad ending. I thought that they were going to marry each other, but they didn't.

Though, as with "Tell Me a Riddle," Joan said that she was bothered by the amount of conversation and description and with the lack of overt

action, a more convincing explanation for her dissatisfaction lies elsewhere. What seemed to be happening with "A New England Nun" was, at least in part, an inability to identify with any of the characters in the story—with old maids, perhaps, but even more so with the kind of woman who would prefer Louisa's placid life. The fact that Joan sees the story's conclusion as sad, despite all evidence to the contrary, indicates a kind of romanticism in her thinking.

Though Joan expressed more discouragement and dissatisfaction with the previous two stories than with any others, there were major or minor instances of misreading with all of them except Updike's "A and P." And in all of the stories, these misreadings tended to occur whenever she was faced with people, statements or scenes that did not fit her own preconceptions and ideas about life. Moderately religious herself, Joan was completely stymied, for example, by an argument in "The Sky is Gray" in which a youg atheist is trying to convince a minister that God is a myth put forth by the white man in order to keep blacks from feeling resentment over their lot. At first, she couldn't remember the scene at all, and when she reread it could still offer no explanation of what it was about.

Her own racial attitudes also interfered with her reading of another scene in "The Sky is Gray," a story that Joan basically liked and understood well. Gaines' story deals with an eight year old black boy whose mother takes him to the city to have a tooth pulled. Despite the sleet, his hunger, and the pain in his tooth, James attempts to live up to his mother's expectations of him as both struggle to maintain their dignity and self-respect in the face of their difficulties. Joan saw clearly the problems the characters faced and recognized their unspoken love and respect for each other, yet in one scene she had a garbled view of what happened. When James and his mother are in a cafe in a black section of town, a man asks the mother to dance and then says something (the exact remark is not made explicit in the story) that makes her slap him. Despite the fact that all of the characters in the scene are black, however, Joan, herself white, saw this as a clearly racial incident and said that the man had called James' mother a "nigger." Joan seemed baffled that she couldn't find the word "nigger" when she went back to look for it and then went on to say that the scene had struck here as unusual because

> usually there's a whole crowd of white people against one black person, but here there's only the one man.

Joan clearly persists in seeing as a racial incident a scene in which a man is, more than likely, merely making some sort of suggestive remark, and she further procedes to try to make this scene correspond to other racial incidents that she has heard or read about. Though the two main characters of the story do suffer because they are black (not, however, as much as because they are poor), a racial interpretation of this scene is unwarranted. Though Joan's stereotype of blacks is much more favorable and sympathetic than that of many other students, it is a stereotype nonetheless.

In another story, "Editha," the title character, blindly caught up in a romantic vision of heroism, pressures her fiance into enlisting to fight in a war in which he clearly doesn't believe. When George is killed, Editha goes to visit his mother, as she had promised him she would, but is totally confused when the old woman, who had reared her son to be a pacifist, lashes out bitterly and condemns Editha's ostentatious self-pity.

Joan, though she recognized George's reluctance to go to war and, in further conversation, discussed her own ambivalence about the draft and the "virtue" of killing to display one's patriotism, still could make no sense of the mother's bitterness. Joan's own views about the morality of war were sufficiently unformed that she couldn't quite understand the mother or understand that it was Editha's own romantic and selfdeluding views of the glories of war that had brought about George's death.

Joan's own personal set of preconceptions and attitudes, then, interfere at times with her reading. The ending of "A New England Nun," we can infer, is "sad" because in Joan's thinking old maids are usually unhappy. The cafe incident in "The Sky is Gray" must be a racial confrontation because often crowds of whites bait and taunt black people. "Editha" is confusing because war, though not an absolute good, is at least not always evil. And because, to Joan, mothers love their children and try to do the best thing for them, "Tell Me a Riddle" is confusing while "The Sky is Gray" is a "wonderful" story. Joan's own stock responses, of course, are not identical to those of many other adolescents. Squire found among his respondents, for example, a tendency to blame parents and to see children, particularly adolescent characters, as more right or virtuous than their elders. But Joan, like others, tends to see literature as well as life in terms of herself and her own life experience. When she can't do so, she is confused. As a pattern, she would offer an interpretation, either in her written statement or at the beginning of the interview. When questioned closely or when asked to reread a pertinent passage she had previously misread, she either continued to misinterpret or, while correcting what she had said about the *passage*, refused to alter her interpretation of the story of which it was a part.

"Adolescents," says Squire, "are incurable romantics." The most significant and striking of Joan's misreadings fall into the category of "happiness binding," the tendency to see a happy outcome regardless of the facts of the story. Sally Benson's "Little Woman" is one such case. In the story, Penny, Ralph's wife of ten years, has always emphasized her tininess and helplessness, fluttering about and trying to look cute. After meeting the wife of business associate, a rather plain but easygoing and competent woman, Ralph begins to feel vaguely discontented. At the end, as Ralph carries Penny over a puddle—an act that has been his custom—"she felt strangely heavy in his arms."

Despite Joan's own athletic competence and basically friendly and open nature, she insisted that the main point of the story—in particular

the ending—was that the pair was so much in love with each other. As Ralph carried Penny:

> He was probably thinking how much he loved her.

Joan, when questioned, laughed and said how angry she would be if someone claimed of her, as Ralph had of Penny, "Oh, she's too helpless to hold down a job."

> I'd show them. I'd go out and get a job right away.

Nevertheless, she claimed to like the characters and to like the story because they were so happy together, despite explicit references in the story to Ralph's growing discontent with his simpering, childish wife.

The single most striking example of "happiness binding" in the study occurred with Joan's response to Irwin Shaw's story "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses," as clearcut a story of woman as sex object as one could find. In the story, Mike and Frances decide to spend the day together rather than visiting friends. Frances is increasingly annoyed at Mike's habit of staring at other girls on the street. Over a brandy, he discusses his attraction to other women and, when prodded, admits that though he hasn't yet been unfaithful in the five years of their marriage, someday he'll "make his move." Even after this confrontation, when Frances cries and decides they'll spend the day with friends after all, "Michael watched her walk thinking, 'What a pretty girl, what nice legs.'"

Joan recognized that there was a conflict between the two characters, and even saw this as positive.

> I thought they had the most perfect marriage because they talked about what they liked and what they disliked about each other. For example, Frances didn't like the way Mike looked at girls and the way he talked about them. And Mike didn't like the way Frances looked at him the first time they met the way she looks at girls on the street.

In this garbled last remark, Joan has reversed the positions of the two characters, for in the story Frances complains that Mike looks at *all* girls the way he had first looked at her. When we found the passage to which Joan referred, she seemed confused that it wasn't as she had remembered it, but still felt sure that somehow she had been right.

To the even more damning exchange in which Mike admits the truth of Frances' accusation that he'll "make his move" sometime, Joan responded

> Didn't she mean "make a move" on another girl? That's what I thought she meant, but maybe she meant make a move on *her*. I don't know.

Despite the scene, one which leaves Frances crying softly, Joan insists that

> At the end they both feel a lot better. She's probably thinking what a nice guy she's got. Love, that's what got me. The main point of the story was that they loved each other.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Joan clearly tends to interpret literary characters and events in terms of what she expects to see, hopes to see. She fits literary characters into the pre-existing mental categories she works with in her daily life—happy married couples, oppressed blacks, loving mothers, unhappy old maids. And she is not, left to her own devices, inclined to change her categories, her own stock responses. to fit unstereotypical characters or situations. Though she claims to be bored by stories with too much description or conversation, her interest in a piece of fiction actually seems more closely related to the age and life situation of the characters involved, regardless of the proportion of conversation to action. She seems more willing and able to become involved with characters whose age is close to her own. Significantly, the story she understood most clearly was "A and P," in which the major character is a teenage boy who quits his job in a romantic gesture of defiance when his boss asks three scantily clad girls to leave the store where he works. Joan looks for happy endings and occasionally sees them even where they don't exist, as in "Little Woman" and "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses." If the recent public rhetoric over women's roles has had any effect on Joan's thinking, no evidence for that effect is apparent in this study. Though Joan is not a superior student and *some* of her difficulties in interpretation might be traced to reading problems, surely not all of them can, for she persists in misinterpreting passages that she can actually read quite well.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

A case study situation is obviously different from the normal interaction between teacher and student, for in the classroom the teacher usually intervenes, guides, and helps students to read and understand more clearly than they would if left to themselves. Nevertheless, a close look at the ways in which a student responds to literature on her own can be valuable in helping us, as teachers, see what kind of classroom intervention is helpful and appropriate.

Most obviously, the mere selection and presentation of literature which fairly represents the lives and experience of women (or any other neglected group, for that matter) is by itself not sufficient to break down stereotyped thinking or stock responses. While the inclusion of this material is an admirable first step, literature about women does not automatically insure that students will be able to identify with these women, will understand them or admire them.

Also, we must realize that any great divergence of the characters in literature from the age or life experience of the students will often make understanding and empathy more difficult. This is definitely not to suggest that adolescents are better off reading only about those like themselves, merely that the teacher's role is more difficult and more important the less fictional experience resembles the student's own.

If stereotyped thinking, stock responses, "happiness binding," and difficulty in identifying with and understanding characters unlike themselves are problems faced by the adolescent reader, then this study, like Squire's

> demonstrates again and again the importance of helping students learn to evaluate their impressions and to weigh evidence in the terms presented by the author. (Squire, p. 39)

Squire goes on to suggest that

> individuals in this age group need extensive help in learning how to control affective impulses during the evaluation of evidence. (p. 55)

If, in addition to helping students learn to read more carefully and to evaluate evidence, however, we want to help them gain a fuller understanding of themselves we might deliberately focus on their own emotional reactions and responses. Once we admit publically that all of us tend to see life and literature in terms of our own categories, our personal set of stock responses, our subjectivity, then we can help students to realize more clearly what their own preconceptions and habits of thinking are. A student who can recognize, without feeling shamed or being told that he is wrong, that his interpretation of literature is shaped, like everyone else's, by his own ways of looking at things, not only has a better understanding of himself but is also more likely to be aware of his personal blind spots and set of stereotypes and be able to change them.

SUNY, Buffalo

A Case Study of a Seventh Grade Writer

by Betsy Morgan

One point on which most teachers of writing can probably agree is that attempting to teach students to improve their writing is often a complex, time-consuming, emotionally taxing, puzzling, and frequently thankless task. Rarely is it either orderly or systematic. Consensus is more difficult to reach from this point on, however. Some conservative teachers brandishing Warriner's *Handbooks* would most likely be eager to square off against any newcomer who might dare to suggest utilizing free writing or peer evaluation as a tool in teaching writing. A wide variety of fiercely-held or resignedly-followed methods prevail in the teaching of writing primarily because so little research has been conducted on the composing process. As Janet Emig observes in her study, *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1971), "Most pieces of empirical research on the adolescent writer focus upon the product(s) rather than upon the process(es) of their writing...." She believes that understanding the process which precedes and accompanies the writing of the finished product should be considered at least as important as the product itself to teachers, since it is through this process that a student selects and discards ideas, structures, and words. In her case study approach to the problem, Emig asks a number of difficult questions, such as, "Are elements organized linearly in the writing process? If writing is essentially a selection among certain sorts of options, ...what governs the choices students make?"

Another collection of case studies concerning the writing process (Carol Burgess et al., *Understanding Children Writing*, Penguin Books, 1973) contains this insightful description of the composing act: "those long immobile stares while the inward eye searches for thoughts and meanings, then the jerk towards the physical act as the meanings are transferred to paper." The authors note the many difficulties of written as opposed to spoken language. Among these are the absence of important nonverbal support from a listener, and the need for complex planning. Ultimately, however, the Burgess book points out the rich rewards for the writer:

> ...he can ponder much more slowly what he has to say. Also he can sustain his thinking over a much longer period.... There is no one to interrupt him or to pose some other topic. Thus the writer is free to extend the range of his thinking virtually without limit, and to hold on to it. Also he can develop a more complex organization of his meaning than is open to him in talk.... Having done so it is permanent, something which he can come back to or which others can read without needing him there to expound it.

The Case Study

To try to determine something about the nature of the composing process, using a plan similar to Emig's, I planned to meet with my subject, Carleen, a total of ten times, an average of twice a week. This plan contrasts with Emig's in that her case study included only three pieces of writing, while mine included thirteen. Using James Moffett's modes of discourse as a guide (*A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13*. Houghton-Mifflin, 1968), I selected a variety of modes as writing assignments, hoping that by varying the kinds of writing Carleen produced, I would obtain a more comprehensive sample from which to draw conclusions and implications. I intended to use Emig's technique of composing aloud into a tape recorder—assuming that Carleen would accept the idea—in an attempt to get more directly at the composing process.

Date	Writing Assignment During Session	Writing Assignment At Home
6/3	Preliminary interview	
6/6	#1 Dramatic dialogue	#2 Dramatic dialogue
6/11	#3 Socratic dialogue	
6/13	#4 Interior monologue	#5 Autobiographical incident
6/17	#6 Autobiographical incident	
6/20	#7 First-hand biography	#8 Reaction to photograph
6/25	#8 Reaction to photo #9 Poem #10 Poem	#11 Notes for reportage
7/1	#11 Reportage	
7/2	#12 Essay	
7/3		#13 Story

Beginning my interviews so close to the end of the school year carried with it a built-in problem. Both Carleen and I had begun to weary of school and school-type activities to the point that neither of us was as fresh as we might have been earlier in the school year. This feeling, which grew worse with time, became an almost palpable entity by June 25, the first meeting after school was out for both of us. Since I was not wielding the power of the grade, it proved to be pure good will on Carleen's part that carried the study through to its conclusion.

The structuring of my case study report follows the outline on pages 34 and 35 of Emig's study.

Context

For the subject of my case study I chose Carleen Patcyk, whose family lives in the Buffalo suburb of Kenmore. Her neighborhood might be termed working class, although within a few blocks it merges into more typically suburban houses with larger lots, and finally, into exceedingly well-to-do areas. The school system Carleen attends reflects the make-up of the community—predominantly middle and upper-middle class—but also including some students from clearly disadvantaged homes, most of these students living in the notoriously "tough" Parkside Project.

Carleen is thirteen years old, eldest of five closely-spaced children. Her one sister is eleven; her brothers are ages twelve, nine, and six. Carleen's father, until recently employed as a factory worker, lost his job when the factory closed down and is now unemployed. Her mother works as a housewife. Both parents encourage their children to study hard to achieve as much as they can in school.

Carleen's junior high school belongs to the very large Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda School District, noted for its fine educational programs. Comprising twenty elementary schools, three junior highs, and two immense high schools, the district traditionally fosters high achievement in almost every area from elementary reading test scores to National Merit Scholarship awards. It was largely because of this reputation that Carleen's parents moved their family to Kenmore.

Carleen's grades are generally the best in her family. Her seventh grade average of 93 placed her among the top ten students in her junior high school class, an honor that was written up in the local paper. Extracurricular activities include playing the flute in her school band. She practices conscientiously every day. Her first devotion is to her Yorkshire Terrier, Jasper, which her parents gave her earlier this year.

During the study, Carleen seemed a very quiet, willing, and polite subject. The two major contrasts between Carleen and Emig's subject, Lynn, were those of age—Lynn was a high school senior—and degree of verbalization. Whereas Lynn showed herself to be extremely talkative about her composition process, Carleen, although she obviously wanted to cooperate, found it hard to answer questions at great length. Whether this difficulty arose from a natural reticence or a cognitive immaturity—or a combination of both—I cannot be certain.

Nature of Stimulus

All of Carleen's writing for this study I assigned her. Those pieces written during the session and those written while Carleen was at home are noted on the outline of meetings above. Instructions for each assignment had been typed on a card in advance; after Carleen read the instructions, I encouraged her to ask any questions before beginning to write. Many of Moffett's modes that I selected were unfamiliar to her, particularly the dramatic and Socratic dialogues, and the interior

monologue. At times during her composing aloud in these modes, she would interject, "This is a tough one!" She seemed more at ease with tasks that were more familiar, such as the autobiographical incidents and the story.

Prewriting

In her study, Emig advances the following hypothesis:

> The length of the prewriting period available affects the choice of subject matter. If, according to the writer's perception, the period is curtailed by his own schedule or by others, he usually does not elect to work on a topic...he regards as cognitively or psychically complex. Rather, he chooses one he perceives as more "programmable"—that is, one that corresponds with some kind of schema he has already learned..., and one he has internalized.

Some of Carleen's choices of topic appear to bear out this hypothesis. When she had to choose two out of three topics for her first two compositions, she discarded one about camping because "camping seemed more complicated—more words to write." When she brought in her autobiographical incident "Stiches" (#5) I asked her how much she had to think before beginning to write, to which she answered, "I didn't; I remember everything." Later she told me that she had written about the same incident in an autobiography several years earlier. Confronted with several possible essay assignments, she immediately chose to describe the process of washing her dog. Looking through my notes later, I was reminded that Carleen had told me that one of the speeches she had given in sixth grade dealt with how to wash a dog; therefore, even though the topic related directly to her experience, Carleen was also relying on a formula that she had used before.

The length of Carleen's prewriting periods generally stayed under 90 seconds. In assignments 1, 3, 4, and 10, she paused no longer than 20 seconds before beginning to write; #9 took a little longer. I guided her through her prewriting periods in two cases (#6 and #7), when she experienced difficulty coming up with ideas; these two segments averaged about 90 seconds. Two exceptions were #2 and #13, both of which she wrote at home. Assignment #2, a dramatic dialogue, took some thought: "Before I ever started I was thinking about it"; however, she was unable to say exactly what she was thinking about, and she mentioned that she had no idea how it would end. About #13 she reported that she had thought "about five minutes." This prewriting is not on tape, although I asked her to say as much of the story as was in her head before she began writing, which she did.

Planning

Invariably, unless I specifically asked for a written or verbal plan for a piece of writing, Carleen found it most natural to proceed without a plan of any kind. In our preliminary interview when I asked her whether she usually planned her writing, she responded that she didn't: "It just...comes out." For example, about a haiku she wrote in fifth grade,

she remarked, "Oh, that was a brainstorm! ...I don't know how I thought of that; it just came to me."

Rays of Sunlight

A ray of sunlight
Came rolling down upon me
Casting a shadow

This finding appears to substantiate the data in the table on page 26 of Emig's study, showing that able students—eleventh graders—tended not to make formal plans for compositions.

In assignment #11, the reportage assignment, I instructed Carleen to take detailed notes from which she would write her observations. She brought back twenty-one points concerning a cousin's dance recital. Of these points, she condensed the last fourteen into three sentences as the end of her paragraph:

> The lights went off and kids got in their placing for their dancing. The lights went on and they danced. 7 dances were done the same way.

Her explanation for not including details about the dances was, "I didn't want to put it in; there were so many of them....I'm too lazy today." Thus, her planning in advance did not strongly influence her writing of the piece.

At my instruction, Carleen formulated a verbal plan for her final composition, "A Strange day for a marsion."

> I'm gonna write about The Strangest Day Ever [one of the titles offered her in assignment #13]. First I have to...to, all right, tell what I'm gonna say...all right...in an outline...or whatever. Okay, first...all right...I'm a Martian who lives on Mars. That sounds silly! (giggle) All right, so...um...like, I'm walking along the planet, and I...somehow get onto this island; and I see, like, strange things, things that, like, instead of fish swimming, fish are walking, or instead of flowers growing above the ground, they grow underneath the ground, like opposites of what happens. And...then...I'll...have the Martian—well, me—it'll be...he'll be talking, telling you what's happening; and at the end...uh...the Martian fi—wakes up and finds out it was...um...a dream...I guess (giggle). All right, I think I'll n—I think I'll title it after I'm done...writing it, so I can get a better...I'll try it, see if it sounds better. Okay...all right, I'll introduce myself first.
>
> A Strange day for a marsion
>
> I am a marsion, I live on Mars. My name is Berzard. But you may call me Mr. Berzard. I am hear to tell you about the strangest day ever. Well everyday is strange on Mars but this day was the strangest! I was taking my ordinary morning walk when I spotted a island about ½ a mile ahead of me. I decided to investigate I got to the island and discovered the water was to hot to swim across even though we were on the ice cap of Mars. Well I got myself a boat and paddled across. I landed my boat on the island and I look around. I didn't see any thing so I started walking. The first sign of life was a red toad. As I walked on further I found a pair of tree speaking to each other. I didn't go that way for fear they'd eat me. Next I saw worms crawling in dry sand instead of the worms being brown they were orange. The island was just full of oposite things

the last oposite thing I saw was a fish walking on dry land and marsions like myself swimming & living under water. After that I decided I had to get out of their—I got in my boat and started to paddle away. Then it happened. a big wave hit me and my boat and I woke up and found myself in water for the ice cap was melting. My advice to you is never live on a ice cap.

The End.

Carleen stayed relatively close to her plan in this piece of writing, although, as usual, she apparently felt no need to put the plan into writing. I noticed with interest that this story is neither as long nor as involved as any of the stories she submitted in her writing autobiography; not one of those stories was written from a formal plan. This difference may have arisen because of my special instructions regarding this last piece of writing, or because Carleen would not receive a grade for her efforts, or because she was anxious to leave with her family for a vacation. Whatever the reasons, it is possible that formulating a plan beforehand actually inhibited Carleen in her writing.

Starting

Starting a composition rarely presented much of a problem to Carleen. In most cases, after only a brief pause, she would attack her first sentence in a logical, matter-of-fact way, completing it in what seemed a very short time—usually under one minute. In Carleen's first sentence, meaning, rather than wording, seemed to be of primary importance; and since she did not concern herself with subtle manipulation of words, as soon as she decided on a "first" element, she stated it directly and simply:

Assignment No.

#6	My brothers said that they were better snowball throwers.
#7	I was taking Jasper for a walk he's my other dog.
#11	We went to Kleinhan's Music Hall to watch my cousins dance residal.
#12	The first thing to do when washing a dog is to catch the dog.

One exception to this seeming ease in starting occurred during assignment #5, in which she took nearly three minutes to formulate her first sentence—a construction I judged to be one sentence because of her inflection, although she punctuated it as two.

When I was about 4 years old. I was climbing some cupboards that were build inside the wall.

She spent roughly half her time writing the first clause. The first three words came rapidly, followed by "a little kid." Then she hesitated, mulling over whether to give her age. That problem solved, she read repeatedly over the clause, debating whether to tell where she lived at the time. She discarded that idea and immediately came up with the second clause. All these decisions were accompanied by frequent rereadings of the uncompleted sentence from the beginning. Her final decision involved whether to give the next action or to tell where the cupboards were

located; she elected the latter. One probable reason for her spending so long on this sentence was that she wrote the piece at home and, therefore, did not feel as much time pressure as she might have in my presence. Also, Carleen used left-branching, which appeared in only one other initial sentence in her thirteen pieces; possibly the more complex construction can account for the increased writing time.

Composing Aloud

In her study Emig observes:

> ...even the most mature and introspective students in the sample found composing aloud, the chief means the study employed for externalizing behavior, an understandably difficult, artificial, and at times distracting procedure.

Carleen told me that she had practiced composing aloud at home before her first assignment. Even so, she thought she might feel less nervous if I left the room while she wrote the first time. Her anxiety was obvious in her first statement: "Oh brother, tape recorder's on...um...okay...what should I do?" While composing her second assignment, at home, she still seemed acutely self-conscious about verbalizing her writing process; at one point she announced loudly, "If anybody's looking in here, I'm gonna kill 'em!" Although not nearly as verbal as Emig's subject, Carleen gamely attempted to record her writing process on tape. Occasionally, when she fell into a pattern of merely saying her words as she wrote them, I reminded her to verbalize her thoughts as well.

Some of her comments took the form of personal evaluation of the assignment or her own work, remarks on her assignments ranging from, "This is a silly assignment," (#1) to "This is hard" (#7). What Emig calls ego-enhancing expressions of feeling were present, although not to the same high degree as in her study. Carleen's occasional self-congratulation never went beyond, "Eh, sounds good," and "I guess that's good." Generally she voiced her few positive reactions in the phrase, "Yeah, I guess so." Only twice did she criticize herself sharply—midway through #1 and in the first line in #2. Contemplating a repetition in #1, she said, "No, wait a minute; that don't sound good; forget it." In #2 she had not yet written the line down, when she said firmly, "That's dumb," and proceeded to write something else. Even though Carleen's praise of her writing seemed somewhat muted according to her verbal behavior, in response to my request that she grade her revised version of assignment #7, she quickly placed a 94 at the top of the paper.

Assignment #7

> I was taking Jasper for a walk he's my other dog. I turned around and saw a German Shepard running at me and Jasper. Jasper was under the dog and I couldn't see him. So I pulled him up by the chain. Jasper was growling and Scruffy herd him. Scruffy opened the door and ran out. He jumped on the Shepard. The dog ran away and tripped over the strings by the lawn. Then he started to tangle with Scruffy. Stacey came running out and saw the fight. She ran to tell dad. Dad tried to grab Scruffy while yelling at the people who owned the other dog. He said, "You should have your dog on a lease!" Then dad pulled Scruffy out by the neck and hind leg. Again he yelled

at the people. After all the confusion he brought him in the house. We came to the conclusion that Scruffy was protecting Jasper.

The End

Carleen's tapes revealed a number of interesting stylistic and syntactic choices in several of her pieces. In assignment #1, a dialogue involving a dispute between a student and a waitress over an unsatisfactory hamburger, Carleen first called the hamburger "bloody" but later wrote "raw," a subtle connotative shift; later, she spoke the waitress's line, "I don't eat them I just deliver em." Not pleased with the line, she changed "deliver" to "serve." In the same sentence, she weighed the sound of the more colloquial " 'em" against "them" and decided to use " 'em" to end her sentence. Assignment #2 showed her consciousness of the undesirability of over-using one word: " 'Well'...no, not 'well,' I'm bored of using that word." Assignment #5 involved a number of similar decisions. Her first was to strike "a little kid" and substitute "about 4 years old." When asked why she did so, she replied, "I don't know; I just wanted to say how old I was." Shortly thereafter, she mused, "Now, should I tell about Mom being shopping later or now?...No, I'll tell later, because I don't want to interrupt the story." Carleen obviously cared about the momentum of her composition. She also demonstrated a desire to clarify a picture; after saying that she stepped on a toy truck, she wrote that she stepped on the *edge* of the truck. That she stepped on the edge explained more clearly why the truck was flipped into the air later. After writing that her lip was cut, she spoke the line, "Well, Dad didn't give me a spanking"; without writing that sentence down, she moved immediately to her next sentence, which she verbalized twice: "Well Mom wasn't home so Dad just put some ice on it." Then she backtracked slightly:

"...sliced my lip. It was bleeding a lot." ...No, well, "Mom wasn't..." I'll use the same thing as I did before and I'll add that. "Mom wasn't home so Dad put ice on it because it was bleeding...bleeding so much."

This instance represents one of the few times Carleen consciously manipulated a clause.

Assignment #5

Stiches

When I was about 4 years old. I was climbing some cupboards that were build inside the wall. I wasn't suppose to climb them. Then dad came walking down the hallway and all I saw was a black shadow, but I knew it was him. I knew he was going to hit me so I started to back off into the boys bedroom. At that time my brothers had alot of trucks and they were scattered all over the room. I stepped on the edge of one and I [On tape she says "it."] flew into the air. At that time the tailgate flew open and the truck came down just missing my head but the tail gate cut my lip. Well mom wasn't [home] so dad just put ice on it because it was bleeding so much. When mom got home she got all shook up like she always does when we get hurt, She said I needed stiches so we went to the hospital. I remember asking her if it would hurt I can't remember what she said, then I remember going into a room with 1 doctor and 2 nurses. All they did was sterilize my lip they didn't even num it. Then a black sheet

came over my face with a hole for my mouth. Then I remember screaming. I can't remember any more.

The End

My questions concerning Carleen's reasons for making her changes elicited little response. It appeared that, although she deliberately made these choices, she lacked either the cognitive skills or the verbal sophistication to explain why. She would generally say, "That was the way it happened," or "That is what I remember." Similarly, when she looked over what she had written in assignment #8, a reaction to a *National Geographic* photograph, she noticed the short, choppy sentences right away, although she did not mention them specifically; she said, "I wouldn't know how to correct it, but...it doesn't say much."

Carleen's composing aloud also brought out an ever-present aspect of the writing process—correct transcription of already-formulated words and ideas. In repeated instances, Carleen's pronunciation and inflection came out incorrectly on paper; thus, although her spoken ideas would have been absolutely clear, her written version of identical ideas sometimes lacked the clarity that she had intended. One example appears in the piece above; she said twice on the tape that the truck—"it"—flew into the air, but she wrote "I" instead. In other assignments she made similar errors, writing "angry" instead of "anger," "build" instead of "built," and "lease" instead of "leash." In a like manner, she frequently used correct voice inflection on tape only to punctuate it incorrectly on her paper, as in the first two "sentences" of "Stiches." Several other instances appear in the same composition.

Reformulating; Stopping; Contemplating the Product

As Emig discovered in her research, these three steps in the composing process occurred either rapidly or not at all. At no time did Carleen revise her composition unless I specifically asked her to do so; she never rewrote a piece. When I asked her why, she simply replied that she didn't "want to bother." After she completed assignment #7, I invited her to pretend she was a teacher and mark down any improvements that she could think of. Concentrating on the second half of the piece, she broke up a run-on sentence, added a direct quotation, and improved her wording of the time sequence. Before assigning herself a grade of 94, she said that, prior to the revisions, the piece would have rated a mere 87. In spite of the improved quality of the revised piece, Carleen did no other revising on subsequent assignments unless I requested it. Since this situation may have been brought about by the fact that I would not be evaluating her writing, I asked her if this was her usual practice, to which she answered that she revised "sometimes" and rewrote "very seldom."

As to ending a composition, Carleen stated, "When I'm writing a story, when I feel like ending it, I just end it." With few exceptions, she seemed to be guided by an imaginary line one-half to three-fourths of the way down the page. In assignment #8, when she could not reach this line, she appeared uncomfortable and waited a long twenty-five seconds,

reread the entire assignment card, added a short sentence, and then announced that she was finished. The two poems she wrote seemingly posed no difficulty; she penned the endings decisively and without hesitation. She had just returned from a visit to Pennsylvania, and her report card had not yet arrived.

I Wish

Assignment #9

I wish I didn't have to go to school
I wish all the teachers would quit
I wish god would give everyone a smart brain.
I wish I was out of school
I wish I was a rabbit then I wouldn't have to go.
I wish I could run around all day and play.
I wish I lived in P.A.

Assignment #10 A peanut is like a small brain
The dark is like the color black
The sun is as big as something
A pen is like a quil
A Nixon is like a dumby
A duck is like a quack
A report card is like a put down.

Influence of Teachers

The primary influence of Carleen's teachers of writing seems to have been that of instilling her with a concern for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. She remembered no teacher particularly fondly, the one who stood out in her mind being a very strict fourth grade teacher. Of this teacher Carleen made the revealing remark, "My grammar ain't too good...and so...I...just didn't like her." In answer to my question about what she had been taught about writing, Carleen continually stressed the word "right." She mentioned paragraphs, periods, commas, question marks; all of these had to be "right." Of this year's English teacher she said, "I don't remember her telling us anything else about writing, like how to do it or anything." It was her social studies teacher this year that she said provided at least one specific instruction on writing. In the hypothetical situations and stories they wrote for the class, their teacher told them to "make believe I'm five years old and you've got to tell me everything." Carleen remembered this guide because she often tended to summarize rather than specify.

In one assignment, she caught herself contemplating a double negative and corrected it, commenting, "Hey, there's that thing Mrs. _____ told us about. Don't use two 'no's' in a sentence, so it's not 'no more';...it's 'any more, any more.' (pause) Hm, I didn't think I knew that." Spelling slowed her writing sometimes, but she told me that spelling problems generally did not bother her. Evidence of this appeared in Carleen's final tape, in which she added the verbal note, "The way I spelled 'Martian' was m-a-r-s-i-o-n, so you know that word 'Martian.'"

In view of most of Carleen's writing instruction, it is interesting that she gave the following answer to a question about how she would teach writing: "I think what's important is what's in their head—what they're thinking....They can be a rotten speller or something, but they can still make up a good story."

Implications for Teaching

Carleen's writing ability seems to have grown through instinct and practice rather than instruction. Writing instruction in the early grades apparently emphasizes mechanics, often to the exclusion of content. Although students are told to express themselves creatively or accurately, as an assignment requires, they are given little help with possible ways of improving their writing, syntactically or stylistically. Feedback generally takes the form of mistake-oriented drilling on grammar and circling of transcriptional errors, or evaluating writing with vague, unhelpful comments such as "very good." It is difficult to avoid the question: Given Carleen's flair for writing compositions, how much better might she be writing if her growth has been assisted by some relevant, informed instruction in writing?

What constitutes relevant, informed instruction may prove an elusive quantity, but certainly Frank O'Hare's study, *Sentence Combining* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1973), which demonstrates that seventh graders can achieve five years' growth in syntactic maturity in just one year, provides a partial answer, or at least a direction. In addition, David Holbrook (*English for the Rejected*, Cambridge University Press, 1964) shows through a collection of case studies that encouraging "the exploration of inward phantasy...by imaginative compositions of all kinds" can be a useful tool in achieving literacy in less able children; indeed, he calls this method "the root of literacy." His study can probably be of some value to teachers of children of many ability levels. I also suspect that Moffett's concept of having students read and write in the same mode would reap some positive results.

Although mechanics admittedly serve some function in the composing process, teachers might benefit from a recognition that failure to transcribe properly does not necessarily indicate failure to think or reason clearly. As Carleen's composing aloud demonstrated, thinking an idea through out loud does not guarantee that it will be written down exactly as stated. At its worst, this problem manifests itself in the chronic nonspeller, whom most teachers of writing have experienced at frequent intervals during their careers. I do not consider myself enough of a psychologist to explain the missed connections causing this problem, or to suggest a remedy; but in light of this case study and others, I believe that transcription must take a separate and subordinate position to the production of fresh, vigorous ideas.

A related problem illustrated by this study concerns Carleen's tendency to choose a simpler topic. If she is to be viewed as representative of her age group, it is possible that because of previous instruction in

writing, students find easier topics more attractive than more challenging ones. Since Psychology 101 provided me with the theory that man will usually choose a stimulating environment over a bland one, I will draw the perhaps tenuous conclusion that there has to be something unnatural about a student's opting for the simpler topic. If there is any substance to my conclusion, I further conclude that our widespread, punitive system of grading compositions must bear a major share of the responsibility for this tendency among students. A better method of evaluation—whether teacher comments, peer comments, individual conferences, or any combination—may prove superior to simple letter or number grading of writing. As Emig points out, "...for a number of reasons, school-sponsored writing...is a limited, and limiting, experience." Further research into the writing process will lead to more effective methods for expanding, rather than limiting, a student's writing potential.

Kenmore West Senior High School
Kenmore

Exploring Early Stages of Writing Development: A Fourth Grader Writes

by Ann Seaman

Janet Emig was the first to publish a case study of the composing process itself. Her study (*The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*. NCTE, 1971) attempted to answer such vital questions as:

1. How does the context of student writing affect the writing process?
2. What stages or elements are there in student writing?
3. At what point do students start and stop writing?
4. How does school initiated writing differ from student initiated?
5. What is the effect of intervention on the composing process?
6. What resources do students bring to the act of writing?

Emig states her belief that the composing process consists of specifiable elements, moments and stages which can be described. With hopes of testing her belief and answering these questions she set up a series of interviews with eight twelfth graders. The four interviews with each student included: establishing a writing autobiography, composing aloud, discussion of student writing, assigning of particular tasks and discussion of the particular stages. I have attempted to follow her model fairly closely but have selected for my study a fourth grader, named Michael. Since I knew very little about what a fourth grader is able to do, I needed to be somewhat looser in my planning and more flexible in the design of my study. I also needed to consider the attention span of my student. As an addition to Emig's basic outline I also interviewed three of Michael's former teachers in order to gain more insight into his performance in a classroom. I planned to make a comparison between what he remembered about assignments and what assignments were actually made. I also included more questions about what he was reading than did Emig, in an attempt to ascertain what relation there is, if any, between reading and writing. In the study I will discuss first, in some detail, Michael's personal biography and later I will look at Michael as a writer today. I hope to tie the two sections together with some conclusions about composing and implications for the classroom.

The Study

Biography

Michael is a fourth grade student in a rural western New York community. The elementary school he attends is located in a tiny, politically

conservative village which is 99% white. His parents own their own home, which is located at the crossroads at the center of town. He is within easy walking distance of everything the town has—corner store, church, small library, and school. His father completed the eighth grade and is a truck driver for a cement factory; he works regular daytime hours and has his week-ends free. Michael's mother, a housewife, has a tenth grade education. She is described by Mike's teachers as appearing fanatically religious and extremely conservative. Neither parent does any writing at home, nor are there any magazines in the house. However, Michael's mother is taking a course to complete her high school. Mike has a younger brother, Andy, who is in the third grade.

Mike is a very sensitive, thoughtful, and considerate person. He came to the case study meetings willingly and with enthusiasm: he is very anxious to please and responds to encouragement. He has a wonderful imagination although he lacks confidence in it because he feels that his brother's is better. Imagination and fantasy are very important parts of his world. He is easily amused by pictures as well as interesting or unusual objects. I was very intrigued by Michael because, although his permanent record shows him to have an average IQ, he failed fourth grade.

Teacher Recollections

When we started the study Mike was just completing fourth grade for the second time. His second grade teacher remembered him as being "very average, very normal"—she was surprised that he had later failed. His permanent record contained such comments by his various teachers as: "does creative thinking, creative in writing." But his record also depicts him as careless, irresponsible, overly sensitive, "a thumb sucker," quick to give up. The three teachers I was able to interview held vastly different opinions about Michael and his work. His second grade teacher found him to be average, mature for his age, working at or above grade level. She remembered him as an average though creative writer with a fertile imagination. The first teacher he had for fourth grade described him as slow with a short attention span, irresponsible, and belligerent. She commented about Michael's writing: "His handwriting was terrible and his spelling atrocious." She continued by stating that in order to get an adequate composition for open house Michael needed to copy his piece over several times. That composition, "A Fire Man" is the only piece of earlier writing I have. She casually mentioned that he did better on imaginative assignments.

A Fire Man

I want to be a fire man To put out fire
I want to find who starts fires and want causes them.
I want to ride in a red truck. If have to give my life for othe poeple.

The second teacher Michael had for fourth grade found him to be vastly improved, experiencing average to above average success in writing. I learned that Michael's mother had suffered a lengthy illness during third and fourth grade, creating more responsibilities at home,

limiting Michael's freedom. This could have affected his writing performance, but it is vital to examine teacher expectations and the nature of the writing tasks assigned. The fourth grade teacher who described Michael as belligerant and slow assigned traditional types of composition: letter writing, book report, description. They neither stimulated the imagination nor drew on the personal experience of the writer. Her expectations of Michael as a writer centered about what Emig refers to as the "accidents [spelling, punctuation, handwriting] rather than the essences." The two teachers who described Michael as creative, average, imaginative, gave relatively stimulating writing assignments. His second grade teacher had the children write two or three sentences about: their favorite toy, a funny picture, what they looked forward to, their favorite T.V. show. The other teacher did: a peer-produced book, caption writing, forming a figure from junk and creating a story about it. This teacher never marked an individual piece of writing, but kept folders and based evaluation on originality, willingness, attempts made at new structures, as well as on form. I must conclude that in Michael's particular case he responded better, and was actually evaluated as writing better, when asked to use his imagination or to draw from his personal experience.

Pre-writing and Nature of the Stimulus

Michael initially could not remember any writing assignments at all, but he liked school much more this year than any other. He said that English is boring, or was before this year. He remembered writing as punishment: the only writing which left an impression was when he had to copy the class rules innumerable times for breaking them. He thought, when asked specifically, that he might have written a book report sometime. He remembered writing stories for his fourth grade teacher. Although he did not have clear memories about teacher-initiated writing, he was quick to tell me that he wrote "stories" for himself "just when I feel like it...when I feel good and got a lot of ideas in my head and I don't got much to do." Emig's Lynn did self-initiated writing only when she was feeling emotionally charged and did not have anyone to talk to. Mike, similarly, wrote when he was feeling positive, happy emotions but did not have anything to do. He never wrote for himself when sad or depressed.

The first tasks where I gave the stimulus were dramatic dialogues which he completed automatically, naturally, with no pre-writing time. For the following two dialogues I gave Mike the minimal situation and the first line.

> You were playing baseball in your yard. You broke a window in the garage. Write what you and your mother say about it.
>
> Mother: What was that crash I heard?
>
> Mike: I hit a window with my baseball
>
> Mother: you will have to pay for it

Mike: I did not mend to do it

Mother: you have to pay it

Mike: ok.

You are in your class. You have had a fight with your friend and he hit you. Your teacher accuses you of starting the fight. What do you say to him? Finish the conversation.

Teacher: Mike I have warned you before. Take your desk into the hall until you can behave like a gentleman.

Mike: I have witnesses that he hit me.
I can prove I am right

teacher: who are our witnesses

Mike: My witnesses are Greg Jim and Tom

teacher: tell our story witnesses

witnesses: Steve hit my in the bark

teacher: Steve move your desk out into the hall

Steve: witnesses Mike hit steve

teacher: class is Steve innocent

class: no!!!

teacher: move our desk steve

I then tried to do memory writing with him. He was able to write down single words representing certain memories (my brother, my desk, Peter, dresser, Math box, pencil) but was unable to expand any one of them into a larger incident. While Emig's students generally preferred to write on "easily programmed" topics and felt more comfortable with facts than feelings, Michael immediately expressed a desire to write either mysteries or funny stories. He could draw topics more readily from his imagination than from reality. A story he had written on his own was an adventure mystery entitled "The Lost Ship."

"The Lost Ship"

One day a ship set sail with supplies. It set sail May 1789 two year pass the suppies did not get where they were going Bob and Ed you are going to find a ship. Ok. boss. Here's the map about here you you will lookok. our boat is ready. it was 1791 we found the spot bang look out boy I all most got shot someone does not want us here you go and find out who it was. I found him he is a Lambly. well its over that go Its night Bob. Let get some sleep for tomoow ok. Ed. The next day they found the ship. Now we have too get it out of there so did they fit it and it make it with the supplies

The End

After about three meetings Mike brought me some examples of things he was reading on his own: mysteries and funny short stories. He particularly enjoyed a fantasy story from "Boy's Life" about knighthood and monsters. The following meeting he brought in a story he had written containing the same rudimentary form and elements:

The man eating Monster

once there was a king who hated the queen infact the whole city. The heared that in the deep deep forest there was a man eating monster. The monster came to the castle. The king said kill the barber so the monster did. The doc found the barber dead. The doc said the barber die from a monster The next night the king said kill the barber wife but she had a gun. The monster kill her. But the doc found green blood. The doc said it is a monster it must be stop before it kell the whole city. But the queen said it es indeed a monster you need many ray gun. But we do not have ray gun. there is a man who make ray gun. the next night at midnight they the monster then they hang the king then they got a nice king

Mike was stimulated by what he read and enjoyed writing in a similar mode. Mike was unable to do any autobiographical writing at all from memory recall until I showed him a simplified version of an autobiographical incident I had written. The following day he came with a delightful short piece:

Wenday is a Trip

It was Wenday afternoon my eye wide with excitement. I had just earned my frist money. I rode downtowe and bought bubble gum when I blew bubbles they burst and stuck to my lip.

It seemed to me a fine piece of autobiographical writing stimulated by the incident of mine he had read in the same mode. The same day he brought in another piece he had written, inspired by a picture he had seen in a spelling book.

A Trapped Animal

My funny little kitten took a step into a pen.
Bang went the gate latch and then face a hen.
Meow said the kitten as if to my name. Open up the cage please. Before you start you games

We had the following exchange when I directly asked him what gave him ideas for writing:

Q: What usually makes you think of things to write about?
A: Things are exciting—funny pictures, stuff like that.
Q: Do you think that if someone brought pictures into the classroom it would make it easier to write?
A: Yeah.
Q: Is that why it's easier for you to write at home?
A: Yeah, 'cause if you see all these pictures and stuff I can write about 'em.

Planning

Mike planned in the usually prescribed manner only when specifically directed to do so. He devised a short outline, rought draft, and final copy only for this composition:

The day I went to B.O.C.E.S.

I jumped out of bed, the day was cold. I walked to schodl, then I saw all the parents. We got on the bus and were going to Medina. The bus driver name was Mrs.

Walker. We got to B.O.C.E.S. The food service poeple had to stay on the bus. They had to fix the food.

Mr. Perry took us to our place. I was in Carpentry. We met the manager of Carpentry. We had to wear safety glass. We wear them because wood might get in our eyes. The man I was working with was Brian. First he showed me how to saw better and hammer better.

We made a box and put a frame on it we painted it red.
I had fun at carpentry I'd like to be a carpenter.
Carpentry is an interesting career.

When asked if writing an outline and a rough draft made it easier, he replied that he could have done it better if he had just written it. He said his paper was corrected for spelling as well as content. When asked which he felt the teacher considered more important, he answered "spelling." The preoccupation with transcription which Emig described in her twelfth graders is already evident in the fourth grade. Michael claimed that he never planned, and yet he described fairly detailed planning for "The Man-Eating Monster." He said that he thought of the idea for it in the course of his school day, looked up in the dictionary all the words he knew he would need, and memorized how to spell them. If he knew what words he would need, he obviously had a fair idea of what he would write about.

Q: How did you know what you would need?
A: Well, I thought it all up in my head.

He said a main idea comes into his head and the rest just "falls out."

Since Mike does not recall planning, but yet obviously plans, I must conclude that planning is such an integral and illusive part of his thoughts in various situations that he is unaware that he does any.

Starting, Stopping and Revision

Mike, like Lynn in Emig's study simply starts at the beginning. For the dramatic dialogues he simply read through the task and began writing without a waver. He stops in much the same manner. He begins at the beginning and ends when he has logically reached the conclusion of events. He expressed concern numerous times about length, apologizing for his shorter pieces, afraid that they were not good. Length is determined by the amount of time he has to spend or how tired he gets. "I would have made it longer but we had to go out," and "I write until I get tired," are typical descriptions. Michael never revised unless directed to do so. To the question, "Would you make any changes?" he inevitably replied, "No, that's what happened."

Conclusions

Michael already showed many of the school-conditioned responses to writing that were so pronounced in Emig's twelfth graders. He showed far more concern for form than content, for length than for effective

expression. It is important to draw some conclusions about the writing Mike initiated himself and think towards further investigation of fourth graders. Mike is at the beginning of formal writing development, where Emig's Lynn was towards the other end. Perhaps a fourth grader is at least as important to study because a fourth grader has suffered far less intervention into the natural developmental process which James Moffett describes in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (Houghton-Mifflin, 1969).

Indeed, Mike seemed to support Moffett's claim that people should be reading and writing in the same mode. Michael was stimulated by the things he was reading to the point where he was able to attempt, and even imitate, writing in that mode. Mike spells terribly, yet when he was interested in making his story good he memorized the correct spelling of the words he needed. I also must conclude, from Mike in particular, that a preoccupation with formal outline planning interferes with the elusive, more natural thought processes. Not everyone needs to plan in the same way.

Writing success, I must also conclude, is colored by the definition of success used by the investigator, or teacher, as well as by intervention in the form of assignments. Kids need to be stimulated to write: both Lynn and Michael wrote for themselves when emotionally charged. At the fourth grade level this implies taking into consideration the fantasy world of a child. A fourth grader is more comfortable with make-believe than with his own feelings and emotions. These are very present, ready to surface, but at eleven he is not aware of how to express them or what they mean. Most of his views about the real world are warmed up versions of adult dinner table harangue. His imagination is his own. Students will write better, feel more confident about themselves, and give more joy to their teachers if encouraged and lead positively through their natural writing development.

Middleport High School
Middleport, New York

Improving Written Characterizations: An Exploration Study with a High School Sophomore

by Kenneth Watson

Introduction

Most teachers want to suggest to the student writer ways of improving his writing that go beyond mere correction of spelling errors and grammar errors. What types of things can a teacher focus on in student writing that will get at writing problems that many students might be experiencing and that are not covered in the weekly spelling units or grammar lessons? What things can the teacher suggest to improve the writing?

To answer this question I planned to work individually with one student from my classes so that I could examine her writing in detail, find a particular aspect of her writing that needed improvement, suggest possible ways to her of making that improvement, and examine samples of her writing later to see if improvement has occurred. If the problem I found was typical of other students, then the possible improvements would suggest ways of improving the writing of many students in my classes.

Background

From my sophomore English class I selected a student of average ability who had time to meet with me during the school day or after school. We met eight times during school hours in a vacant classroom and the sessions lasted approximately thirty minutes each. I took notes during all the sessions and kept any written work she did for my study. The first two sessions were spent getting some background information and focusing on a particular problem of her writing which I felt could be improved. The remaining six sessions were spent trying various ways of effecting improvement. From initial examination of her compositions that year up to the time we began working together she seemed to have writing problems fairly typical of most of my sophomore students.

It wasn't until after I had chosen my case study and started to work with her that I found out she had a very different reaction to the composing process than I had first thought. In my innocence I had assumed my student to be an eager writer and an enthusiastic reader since she had

volunteered to do an extra report and seemed to do classwork willingly. The following description outlines her attitude toward the composing process.

Last year in English she did not write any compositions even though her English teacher, angry at her refusal to write, gave her a sixty-four on her report card each of six marking periods—one point below a passing mark of sixty-five. This year she is doing some of the writing, though she rarely finishes in a class period. She has some study halls each day and it normally takes her one English class plus one study hall (one and one-half hours) to finish a composition of about one hundred and fifty words. Part of the explanation for the long period of time required to finish the composing process lies in the rewriting—rewriting not just in the sense of changing words or correcting grammar, but rewriting an entire paper or starting over on a new idea. She ripped up a recent composition that was only two-thirds completed because she couldn't think of anything more to say. "There was nothing more to say so I threw it away," she later said during a session. When asked why she would throw away anything that she had worked on for so long, she replied, "Half of the time I write it doesn't make sense."

For her the hardest part of the composing process is getting the initial idea. Usually it will take her anywhere from several days to a month to finish and turn in a completed composition. Several times in class I noticed that she would tear up a composition just prior to the end of the period when the composition was to be turned in. Apparently, severe self-criticism on her part prevents her from accepting the value of her own ideas she expresses in writing. During interview sessions I found it extremely difficult to get her to write anything. She would talk, but would refuse to write.

Though she hates to write compositions assigned in class, evidenced by her difficulties in starting and completing the composing process, she does write songs on her own. During the past two years since she started writing songs, she has kept a scrapbook of all the songs she has written. The initial stage of the composing process is rather unique in this person's case. Most of the ideas for the songs come to her while she is taking a bath. "I think of it then, and, after I'm dressed, I write it down." Usually this happens when the house is empty and quiet, which isn't often with seven siblings. "If I have nothing to do the idea just comes to me." Once she starts writing it takes her only about fifteen minutes to write it down. She doesn't revise it at that time, but later (a year or more) she might go back and reread it and change a few words around. She never makes any major revisions or additions. "I just word it different." The ideas come to her as inspiration. "You can't say 'I'm going to write, then write it down.' It just won't come." The above attitudes seem to reflect an inability to improve or make changes in what she has written. In part this may be due to her self-criticism evident in the already quoted remark, "Half of the time I write it doesn't make sense," which prevents her from accepting the value of her ideas.

The above ideas seem useful in looking at her writing because they offer insight into the initial stage of the composing process. Since she encounters considerable difficulty in beginning to write, and since she seldom has anything to write about (neither when the writing is teacher directed nor when she writes on her own), and since she seldom revises her writing, her writing in its final stage evinces many incomplete thoughts, particularly concerning characters she is describing.

Also, there is very little logical order of development, neither within the composition as a whole, nor within paragraphs. Ideas are not developed nor are any clear relationships developed between ideas. Even when she consciously tries to set up a contrast between two ideas or characters, it fails because the contrast is never made convincing—it lacks details to specifically tell ways in which a contrast is made and it fails to answer too many questions. She lacks development of any single idea, either by itself or in juxtaposition with another idea. For example in a song she writes, "My friend's name is Sam. Our love is true. Nothing can depart us now. Your father you think that he is true, but between us we're through." Nowhere else in the song does she tell anything more about Sam (her former friend who got her pregnant) or her husband (the person who thinks he fathered the child). In fact, it is only through talking with her later that the juxtaposition between Sam and the father is made clear. The following paragraphs give further examples of difficulties in character description.

My concern with character development in narrative writing was prompted by my student's incomplete descriptions of characters that left too many questions in my mind as I read her narratives. Very often she will make a simple statement such as "my uncle is a health nut" or "my brother stays out late" and then move on to another piece of action as in this selection: "My mother sits up sometimes until two or three o'clock in the morning waiting for my brother to come home. She always asks him to come home earlier. My uncle Joe is different from my brother. He is a health nut. He buys all these vitamins and health food." Besides not telling much about her uncle or brother at this point, these statements have no relation to the rest of the paper. There is no development of character and no answer to possible queries such as why is the uncle a health nut? what foods does he eat? or why does the brother stay out late? The reader is not given enough information about the characters to evaluate past actions or to anticipate future developments.

In another paper she describes a current boy friend in the following words: "I thought he was a real stiff so for the next couple of weeks I never was home when he came or called." Three sentences later she suddenly changes her attitude toward him without letting the reader know why. "He asked me if I could meet him at Your Host and I told him no. Then he asked me if he could come over to my house and I said 'o.k.' After all he was a pretty nice guy." Like the previous excerpt, this one does not give enough information about the characters—herself or her boyfriend. The reader is left wondering: why did she change her

mind? what did he do that made him a stiff? what did he do that made him a nice guy? Too many questions are left unanswered in the reader's mind.

Data

I would like my student to be able to ask more and better questions about the characters she is describing—questions that would get her to think about what other people (characters in her stories and compositions) do, think, and feel. For example, what did a character *say* that showed how he felt or thought? What did a character *do* that showed how he felt or thought? What did a character *think* or *feel* that resulted in a particular action? Other possible questions are: What sort of person is the character like? What is most unusual about the character? Who does the character remind you of? What would this character be likely to do? or not likely to do? Where would you expect (or not expect) to see this character? Asking some of these questions (and anticipating these questions in a reader) would hopefully result in her telling more about the character's thoughts, feelings, and actions.

I decided that getting her to talk about characters would be a good starting point and would probably lead most directly back to better writing if she could apply what she talks about to her writing. I found in talking with her that she could expand on what she had written. For example, in reference to a current boy friend she writes in her original narrative, "I thought he was a real stiff so for the next couple of weeks I never was home when he came or called." During a session with her I asked her to tell more about her boy friend. When I asked why she thought he was a stiff she replied, "I didn't like him at first. He's older. He didn't say much." When asked why she wouldn't see him she replied, "He used to call me up all the time. I used to tell my mom to tell him I'm sick or I'm out or something. One day, it was on a Saturday, it must have been every hour he called. I wouldn't answer the phone. Finally, one time my mother wasn't home and I answered the phone. He asked me if I could meet him at Your Host and I told him no." From the preceding dialogue it seems apparent that she is able to describe things she does with her boy friend in detail. She goes on to describe an automobile accident, injuries suffered during a basketball game and other activities. All these activities show that she has rich material as background for a paper. Consequently, I feel that she has enough information to answer my questions and to give more information in her compositions in anticipation of readers' questions.

In talking with her she seems able to expand adequately her description of character regarding the answering of questions such as *what* did he do? *when*? and *where*? When asked why does he seem like a stiff? or why did you suddenly decide to invite him over after saying no for so long? her answers seem less compelling. Frequently, she has no answer, responding, "I don't know." Admittedly, questions beginning 'why' are more difficult, but also more important to ask if character motivation is

to become clear. The student seems to be at a point of intellectual or emotional development where she cannot or does not want to consider character motivation. Indeed, even her handling of details of plot is skimpy, unless someone continually asks her questions.

Another approach I employed in getting her to write more about characters was using pictures (from *Life* magazine and the *Buffalo Evening News*, for example) and having her ask What do I see? What do I hear? What do I feel? of pictures involving people in different situations. Also some of the questions previously mentioned such as What sort of person is the character like? What is most unusual about the character? etc. are invaluable in eliciting more information about the character. The advantage of this approach is that it puts her in the position of having to ask the questions mentally first before she makes up a story about the picture. She has to ask herself, Who are these people? Why are they grouped together? What are they doing, thinking, and feeling?

One picture she chose to discuss concerned a young boy injured in war, surrounded by his family and spectators. She describes the people: "The one guy's a doctor." I asked (What is he doing?) "He's telling the other guy that the one guy is dead." (Who is the other guy?) "That's probably his brother. He don't look old enough to be his father." (What is the older brother thinking about?) "He's sad. He probably ain't got no parents. It was his responsibility to take care of his brother and then this happened." (What happened?) "He probably got killed by a bomb." (Who are the other people?) "Maybe relatives. Probably some of them knew him." (What are they thinking?) "They're thinking it could have happened to them. The one with a baby is scared to lose her." (Do the facial expressions indicate anything?) "No." (Do the expressions on the faces of the men and women appear different or suggest different thoughts?) "No."

The dialogue shows that it takes continual prodding on the part of a teacher or peer to get her to continue to respond. She does mention a few interesting points such as making up the part about the older brother having no parents and having to be in charge of his younger brother who is now dead. Also, pointing out the almost completely hidden woman carrying a child and expressing the mother's concern for her baby seems a good point. However, she seems unable to use ordinary character clues such as facial expression, hand gestures, grouping of people, etc. to suggest what a character might be thinking, doing, or saying. Perhaps this activity would have elicited more and better description of character if she had talked about the picture in a small group of students in the classroom before writing her description. Of course, this prewriting discussion only sometimes results in better writing. My student still has trouble transferring the results of discussion before or after an initial writing experience to later writing on the same topic.

A third approach I employed to get her to tell more about her characters was to list synonyms, antonyms and other related words of words that she had used to describe the characters in her narratives. I un-

derlined some of the key words describing characters, then listed several synonyms she could have used instead of her own words. I chose most of these synonyms from Roget's *Thesaurus*. I had her pick out appropriate words to describe each character and to justify her choice of words. I asked her the following questions: Why did you choose this word? How will the character change if you choose a slightly different word? What do you add to the character development by choosing this word? What is still missing that might require additional words? My purpose was to get her to compare her choice of a word with other possible choices, and, in doing so, to see what the new word would tell about the character that the old word hadn't. For example, "a real stiff" might be replaced by (1) a quiet, reticent or shy person (2) boring, uninteresting or dull person (3) lazy, a sluggard or a dawdler (4) a bum, vagrant or tramp (5) unconcerned, apathetic or disinterested. In choosing words from one or more of the above categories she would show, perhaps more explicitly, what she meant by her original choice of words.

Conclusions

I tried the three above activities with varying degrees of receptivity, cooperation, and success. The first activity, encouraging her to tell more about characters and then write a new narrative based on the discussion, at first seemed to yield the greatest improvement in character description. However, the improvement did not carry over into her writing, since once I stopped asking questions she was unable to add anything more. Thus in a dialogue with a teacher or peer she seems able to talk about characters rather well, but in her own written monologues she is unable to anticipate a person's questions and to supply important and necessary information about character.

The second activity, using pictures from magazines and newspapers, also ran into the same two difficulties outlined above: (1) her responses—character descriptions—were good only as long as someone kept thinking of the right questions and (2) the carryover into her writing was negligible.

The third activity involved her looking specifically at words she used to describe characters. In giving her possible synonyms she might have used for each word I wanted her to consider, she seemed unable to justify her original choice, and she could not articulate any difference between her original choice and the words I had listed as synonyms. She had a vague idea of what she wanted to say, but nothing that she could narrow down or further define by word choice.

In working with her through the various activities designed to get her to anticipate readers' questions and to respond to them I encountered a great reluctance to talk about her writing. She brought in only one song she had written earlier though I repeatedly asked for more songs. She seemed unwilling to write even after we had talked at length about some of her compositions. Perhaps this is related to her concern, "I don't

know what to write" or to a similar concern, "You just can't say I'm going to write, then write it down. It just won't come." In class she still starts a composition and then tears it in half and sits most of the remainder of the period, trying to decide what to write about.

It is apparent then that this case study did not end up doing what had originally been proposed. The identification of a problem seemed easy enough. The solution, however, was more elusive. The utilization of three activities to help her ask better questions about character ran into one major obstacle that seemed insurmountable—I was always asking the questions. I could get her to tell more about the character then she had written in her paper, but she needed and still needs someone to ask the right questions.

It seems that what I've learned from this research is that the problem is more complex than I originally thought. A new problem has emerged from the research—a teaching problem rather than a research problem. Since the conclusion of the case study seems to imply that one major obstacle I encountered in getting her to tell more about her characters was a constant need for someone to ask questions, perhaps the problem for teaching composition to a class can be stated: How can I arrange the class so that when students write they do so in the presence of someone else (either another student or a teacher) who can keep prompting them with questions? For example, if the class can be arranged in small groups where one student's composition is discussed, the other students could ask questions of the one student writer to elicit more information about characters and situations in the composition. Other teaching procedures I mentioned, such as using pictures or using related words, might also prove useful techniques in small groups with other students to help.

Riverside High School
Buffalo

Writing Introductions: Helping A College Freshman

by Tom Reigstad

INTRODUCTION

"I was always told you had to have an introduction. You can't just start right in and say something. But the years you're supposed to be learning all that stuff, I didn't learn anything. I lived on Guam; the schools there I thought were great, but they weren't. When we came back here, I didn't know anything...Everybody told you what to do, but nobody told you how to do it, so I was kind of lost."

Although Mary (speaking above) has a slightly unique background (she lived on Guam until her family moved to the U.S., when she was in sixth grade), her complaint should sound familiar to any English teacher who has taught writing. Many students, like Mary, are "lost" when told to begin an essay. From my own experience as a student, I cannot recall being given many practical particulars concerning *how* to compose an introduction to an essay. Like Mary, I was taught what the proper format must be (Mary: "Every year we did the bit about composition—introduction, body, conclusion—but I could never figure it out"), but how to actually assemble the opening was left to my own devices. As a teacher, I have, unfortunately, found myself spending more time assigning essay topics and correcting some stylistic, but mostly mechanical, errors, rather than providing instruction on composing processes.

Mary is a freshman at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and is currently enrolled in a Freshman Composition course. Her feeling of being "lost" when composing an opening for a piece of writing has continued from her grade school days on to her present academic situation. She is uncomfortable writing introductions for the written assignments required of her for Freshman Composition. She complained to me that she still is not being taught how to write. I decided to concentrate my work with Mary on the kinds of writing—essays and personal narratives—that she is called upon to write for her college English course. That way, our sessions might prove immediately useful and applicable to her required Freshman Composition writing. I also decided to focus my study on essays and personal narratives, rather than on exercises in "creative writing," because Mary does not write poetry on her own, and because short story writing is too unwieldly and time consuming for the limited (45 minute) sessions available to us.

I have been a personal friend of Mary and her family for several years and, in addition, I taught Mary in a high school film study course two years ago. She impressed me at that time with her ability to write insight-

ful, entertaining film reports. Because I had kept in touch with Mary since her graduation from high school, I did not hesitate to ask her help in my research. Although occasionally we met in the afternoon (in one instance, in order to watch a television soap opera), we generally held our sessions early in the evening for 45-60 minutes at a time. During the sessions, I tape-recorded our discussions of her writing and the few times that Mary composed aloud.

In five early pieces of writing, on subjects of her choice, Mary admitted experiencing difficulty in composing introductions for her essays. By listening to the recordings of our early sessions, I noticed that sometimes she verbalized (while composing aloud, and in follow-up discussion) her struggle to write beginnings:

> "I wish I could just skip this part—the opening."
> "I don't know how to start this."
> "I still don't know how to do introductions, you know. I don't know how to start—that's my biggest problem...Topic sentences. I never think of one."

She tended to regard introductions not only as frustrating efforts, but as inconsequential puffery that stands in the way of the "heart of the essay." In several cases, she referred to her openings as "garbage:" "I never know what to say at the beginning. I usually kind of fill it up with garbage. No one can ever tell the difference. When I can't think of anything to say, I just throw something in."

Based on a close reading of her five early written pieces, I determined that there was justification for her discontent, for the introductions (whether they were clearly demarcated paragraphs from the "body," or whether they were opening sentences within the same paragraph) were not of the same quality as the rest of her writing, and the introductions were often disjointed from what followed. For example, when writing a personal narrative on dreams, Mary's introduction was general and confusing. It failed to set up, or to prepare the reader for, the more precise discussion of two dreams that she goes on to discuss. Although the introduction alone seems to be adequate, it does not smoothly lead in to the isolated descriptions of two dreams that constitute the rest of the piece, and it was so perfunctorily written, according to Mary, that it failed to help her enter the body of her narrative:

> I often have weird dreams that make me wonder about myself. What would Freud think if he got hold of me? Most times the events in my dreams don't seem to mean anything, or if they do I sure can't figure them out.

In talking to me about the opening to her narrative on dreams, Mary expressed her dissatisfaction with its vagueness or purposelessness. To her, it was just another bit to be mechanically written down before launching into the meaningful "meat" of her written discussion. She reflected concern for remedying her ineffective, formulaic openings (by a formula opening, I mean one that is a convenient, personal one—as in "I often do this or that," or an opening that merely re-states the title—as in "My favorite season is..."). One of her reasons for desiring a more ap-

propriate introduction is that, even though in most cases she has no trouble writing the "middle," in the case of the dream narrative, she got stuck—and there was no help in referring back to her introduction for direction:

> "I had a little trouble beginning this one. I was writing about a dream and didn't think I should just start out with 'One night I dreamt this...' I had to put something before it. What I put before it was garbage because it was stupid. I just had to put something... I stopped at one point [within the narrative]. I wasn't sure what dreams to write about and then I wasn't sure how to put it down."

Each of Mary's five early pieces of writing contained several examples of well-developed contrasts. In every case, the contrasts were related to the central point of the piece. Had these contrasts been more clearly defined as issues in the introduction, Mary might have found her introductions to be more helpful and meaningful. In a personal narrative about a childhood adventure on Guam, Mary sets up a consistent contrast between how she and her little friends viewed things and how things really were: "Along the path up, there were sheer drops (of maybe 10 feet!)." Afterwards, Mary revealed how conscious she was, while writing, of bringing out the disparate child/adult perspectives: "The drops couldn't have been that big, the mountain wasn't that big. It was just a little hill. I guess we exaggerated things when we were little." Even though she had presented the contrast in adult/child points-of-view in the opening of the narrative, there was superfluous prose that could have been omitted (phrases that were mechanical, repetitive, formulaic, and that detracted from the contrast—such as, "I had a weird experience that I still remember," etc.). In an essay promoting "Star Trek," Mary made extensive use of contrast throughout the essay (by comparing "Star Trek's" sophistication to other outer space TV programs of poorer quality), but the opening of the essay sounds formulaic and offers no hint of the series of contrasts discussed within: "One of my favorite shows is "Star Trek." I have found that either you love the show or you hate it. I haven't met anyone who is indifferent."

PROBLEM

I decided to help Mary develop her ability to use the strategy of contrast when composing essays and personal narratives.[1] My particular focus was on how her intended sense of contrast was set up in her introductions. If she spent more time thinking about clearly defining the contrasts, in discussing different ways to present them, in considering alternative ways to express them in an introduction before writing a finalized version, I suspected that her introductions might be more exact and purposeful—in her own eyes and to an outside reader.

In order to sharpen Mary's perception of contrast, to get her thinking in terms of a precise, exact expression of the contrast in an introduction that can be more fully developed within a longer piece of writing, and to work out with her a *modus operandi* to follow when putting together written introductions, I devised five activities which offered

various contrast possibilities in several different modes. A primary purpose for these activities, also, was for Mary to put more care and thought into composing introductions. Admittedly, exercises whose end results were only written introductions might seem senseless without being parts of a full-fledged piece of writing. However, in every case, the introductions were written with a larger essay or personal narrative in mind. Sometimes, we even discussed what would be contained in a whole piece, beyond the introduction. Later in the study, Mary composed fully developed pieces of writing, not just introductions.

In each activity, the same basic procedure was followed: Mary considered the possibilities of contrast in each sample (song, painting, short story, etc.), and jotted down a few notes; we discussed various ways of expressing the contrast; Mary experimented with writing some concisely-phrased statements explaining the contrast; then, she wrote a 2-5 sentence introduction designed for a longer piece of writing (which was not written) on the subject; finally, we discussed her satisfaction dissatisfaction with the introductions. For each activity (contrast between sounds of instruments in Goldenberg's "Rich Jew, Poor Jew"; contrast between the meaningful melody and meaningless lyrics in the song "Josephine, Beyond Compare"; how the dress and actions of an individual change for different audiences; contrast between similar scenes in the painting "Stag at Sharkeys" and in a photograph; and the effectiveness of the use of contrast in the opening of the short story, "The Lottery"), the resulting proposed written introductions were not only successively lengthier and more detailed in contrast, but they left Mary (and any reader) with a clear notion of the contrast and ideas that she intended to develop within the body of her paper.

ACTIVITIES AND STUDENT RESPONSES

In our first activity, Mary listened to Goldenberg's "Rich Jew, Poor Jew," and made written notations in poetic form that indicated her awareness of contrasts between the sounds of the musical instruments:

sounds suspenseful
dramatic
scary
(good fairy enters—wipes away evil spirits)
light
happy
evil spirits & good fairy battle it out
both are there
I don't know who won

Then, we talked over how Mary might transfer the contrast described in her "poetic" notes to a clearly expressed prose form. She suggested, orally: "It starts out heavy, it's real slow. Then it gets bouncy. And then, at the end, it mixes." In further conversation, she pursued the problems of including all of the elements of contrast in a possible introduction to a longer essay: "This piece of music starts out slow, then gets fast and then

gets mixed, or something like that. I'll have to think of better words for it. I don't think I'll be able to say it in one sentence, because there are three ideas." Her version of a written introduction, which grew out of the notes and discussion, was:

> In this piece of music there are three separate parts. The first section is slow and dramatic, and then there is a sudden change to a lighter, happier sound. The third part is a mixture of the two sounds, neither one overshadowing the other.

Mary was dissatisfied, though, with the word "overshadowing." After considering other choices for a few minutes, she told me that if she had been required to revise the introduction, she would substitute "dominating" for "overshadowing," because it "fit better."

In the second activity, listening to the song "Josephine, Beyond Compare" (by F. T. Talton), we followed a similiar procedure—considering the sample for its' sense of contrast and taking notes, discussing ways of precisely expressing the contrast, then writing a proposed introduction to a longer piece of writing. Mary took more copious notes this time while listening to the song and identified a basic contrast between the lyrics and the music in her discussion with me: "The song had a good tune, but the words just didn't make any sense. If you listened to the song without listening to the words, it was all right. His voice went with the music, but the words just didn't go." In a matter of minutes after talking about it, Mary wrote down an introduction to a possible essay describing the discrepancies between the effectiveness of the music and the lyrics in the song. Every sentence contributed to the contrast that she was setting up for a more fully developed discussion within an essay:

> The melody of this particular song is a good one; it is slow and thoughtful and gets you in the mood to listen. If you listen closely, though, you might find that the lyrics of the song do not do justice to the tune. They really don't seem to fit.

In another activity, I asked Mary to view George Bellows' painting of two boxers in the ring, "Stag at Sharkeys." I asked her whether or not the fighters are realistically represented, as in a photograph. If not, how and where do the figures differ from those in a photograph? This time, Mary jotted down just a few notes on her own, but she was eager to discuss ways of formulating a concisely-phrased introduction. She was concerned that her introduction not sound formulaic: "I don't know if I should start it by mentioning the painting—I hate openings like 'In this story...' " Since this had been a source of her discontent with, and lack of regard for, her introductions from the outset of our sessions, we spent some time talking about alternative openings. Some openings that Mary suggested were addressed to the contrast, but in a general way which did not mention the title of the painting immediately, such as: "Paintings and photographs have similarities and differences," or, somewhat facetiously, "Sometimes there is a startling clarity in blurriness." Her written introduction reflected our discussion. It began with a general statement of the contrast between paintings and photographs, then it set up a potential discussion of such a contrast, with "Stag at Sharkeys" as the subject:

> Although paintings are usually not as detailed as photographs, there are methods painters can use to give their works as much realistic value. In George Bellows "Stag at Sharkeys," this is evident. The painting is rather blurry but there are several things in the painting that add to it's reality. These factors help you to feel the atmosphere of the painting—you can feel the tension and see the action.

In our follow-up discussion of her satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the introduction, Mary was interested in talking about revisions and more exact ways to express herself. We talked about how to avoid repeating certain terms in the introduction, like "painting" and "feel." She pondered over changing "there are several things in the *painting*" to "there are several things in the *work*," but finally decided to simply delete the prepositional phrase "in the painting." Mary also wanted to alter "These factors help you to *feel* the atmosphere," in order to avoid repeating "feel." After looking through Roget's *Thesaurus*, which I had just shown her how to use, she decided upon: "These factors help convey the atmosphere of the painting." This re-working of the introduction showed her increasing ability to take care in composing introductions which precisely set up the statement of purpose for the longer piece of writing. Also, at this point in our sessions, Mary seemed to be past the point of taking notes before experimenting with written introductions. She preferred to think about what she wanted to say, then experiment with some statements, write a proposed introduction, and then revise it if necessary.

Next, Mary read Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery," and was asked to pay particular attention to the ingredients of the opening of the story. I then asked Mary to write an introduction to an essay about the effectiveness of the opening of "The Lottery." First, she vocalized her sense of contrast witnessed in the beginning of the story: "You can tell something's going on, but you can't tell what...I guess it's the kids gathering stones that tips you off...The nice day with people smiling doesn't seem like it fits. It should be dark and rainy with people standing there scared stiff—but the men are talking about planting and the kids are playing." Mary and I talked about actually constructing an introduction. As in her previous efforts, she wanted to avoid a cliche opening ("Here again, I don't want to start, 'In the story "The Lottery" this or that is happening.'"). So, we discussed how a writer can shift the grammatical subject of a statement, and include the title of a story or a painting while emphasizing some particular point. Mary indicated that she could incorporate the title of a work into a central statement of a topic sentence, without sounding formulaic, when she offered this possible opening, orally: "By concentrating on a series of pleasant descriptions, the introduction of 'The Lottery' sets up a contrast to what follows in the story." She improved upon that when putting together her written introduction:

> The introductory paragraphs in "The Lottery" set up a sense of contrast with what is really happening in the story. The descriptions are of warm, sunny weather, children playing and parents talking among themselves, but there is an underlying tension throughout the paragraphs that makes you wonder what is really going on.

This is continued through the story but never are you sure of the true situation until the end of the ?.

Mary puzzled over her final sentence with me after she left the last word blank. She did not want to repeat "story" (where the question mark is), so she came up with three alternatives to finish off the sentence: 1) "until the end." 2) "until the conclusion." 3) "until the final paragraphs." She told me that she would opt for "until the end," because it is more compact and concise. This, then, was the last of the five activities that I devised to heighten Mary's sense of contrast and in order to develop her ability to describe the contrast clearly in introductions to potential essays and/or personal narratives. It is significant, I beleive, that her suggested introduction to an essay on the opening of "The Lottery" was the longest of her introductions in the series of activities, and was the most fully developed. It not only clearly identified the contrast present in the opening of the story, but it left her with an obvious course for a more detailed discussion within an essay: not only a discussion of the elements of contrast within the opening of the story, but how the opening relates to the rest of the story. By the time Mary was asked to consider "The Lottery," she no longer bothered to take any notes before writing. Instead, she discussed various sentence combinations with me. As in the other exercises, Mary made a point of looking at the finished introduction with a critical eye, and generally made revisions that economized, or trimmed down, the wordiness of her introductions.

REVISING EARLY INTRODUCTIONS AND WRITING COMPLETE PIECES

The next step that I followed in working with contrast in Mary's introductions was to ask Mary to re-write a couple of introductions from her earlier writings. Since she had been particularly displeased with the one about "Star Trek," she chose to write a new introduction to the essay contrasting "Star Trek" with other TV shows. The revised introduction avoided a formulaic approach, stated her purpose for what followed in the body of the piece, and effectively set up a discussion of "Star Trek" contrasted with other TV shows. Moreover, Mary expressed her satisfaction with the re-written version and recognized its strengths: "I knew the previous one was so short and really didn't say anything. This [the re-write] goes together with the rest of the essay better. If I used the new introduction, I could write a longer essay, and include other shows to add strength to my argument." Whereas Mary's original introduction failed to describe the contrasts that were examined within her essay, her re-written introduction set up "Star Trek" as the best of the science-fiction shows, and set up a potential in-depth discussion of differences between "Star Trek" and other shows:

There have been several science fiction shows on television in the past few years, including Star Trek, Lost in Space, and The Time Tunnel. One of the most recent is The Six Million Dollar Man. There are considerable differences in these shows, making some more believable than others. I would say that the best of these is Star Trek, which is not followed too closely by any of the others.

The final stage in my work with Mary involved asking her to compose four complete pieces of writing—either essays or personal narratives. I suggested a few topics that could be matched for comparison to her earlier pieces of writing. She used some of my suggestions, but was free to write on anything that she desired. No matter what she finally chose to write about in these four pieces, she responded by using contrast as a basis for her introductions and for what followed in the pieces of writing. Mary's first "new" piece of writing grew out of discussions we had about her favorite TV soap opera, "All My Children." We even watched it together one afternoon, and I asked her to pay close attention to how the show opens. The episode that we watched provided a good example of how effective an introduction can be. The opening scene described the conflict for the day (an announcement by Dr. Tyler that "Phoebe and I are separating!"), which set off a chain of events in the sub-plots throughout the rest of the half hour program. There were other techniques used to heighten the drama in the opening, such as a heavy chord played on an organ and a camera fade-out to a commercial after Dr. Tyler's startling statement. Mary observed, in our discussion of the show, that "All My Children" is "set apart from other soap operas" because of its production techniques, acting, etc. She then wrote an essay contrasting "All My Children" with other soap operas. The body of the essay is filled with supportive detail ("the relationships between characters are more believable"; "there are notes of reality with current events added"; etc.). Significantly, her introduction to the essay is a fully-developed discussion of the contrast expanded upon within the essay. Even though Mary was a bit unhappy with the introduction ("I thought it was too long. I was going to add a couple sentences, but I thought I better stop."), she said that she could solve her dissatisfaction by eliminating the last sentence, because it was repetitive:

> There are probably a dozen soap operas on the air throughout the day on the three major networks. The difference in most of these shows is very small—there are usually several affairs, a few murders and someone is always doing something that nobody else is supposed to find out about. There is one show, "All My Children," that is also in the soap opera category, but is not quite as far fetched as the majority of the others. The events depicted in this show could actually happen and are much easier to believe.

Of Mary's other "new" pieces of writing, one was a personal narrative comparing her high school days with her present college experience, and another was a personal narrative which commented on the discrepancy between "hype" ads for pop concerts on local radio and the actual disappointment of the concerts themselves. Obviously, both narratives were built around a sense of contrast, and the introductions clearly set up the contrast. While composing both narratives, Mary began writing almost immediately after I asked her to, and except for some crossed-out words, she wrote without much hesitation. The last of Mary's four new pieces of writing concerned misleading bargains in department stores. She experimented with terms, revised some words while writing the essay, and composed aloud ("Is there such a word as

'unrefusable?' Too bad, I'm going to use it anyway."). Her introduction explained the contrast in general, then referred to a specific incident as a lead-in to the body of the piece. In our post-writing talk, she seemed pleased with her introduction, especially because it prepared her for a detailed discussion beyond the introduction and because it came to her without much of a struggle: "I like it. I think it's pretty good. I had lots of things I could put into it—it wasn't like I had to sit here and think for a few hours. I knew what I wanted to say in it." The introduction, I believe, was particularly effective in clearly setting up the contrast between what the bargain ads offer and what she really discovered at the department store:

> Every week at most local department stores there are "tremendous savings" or "real steals" on almost anything you can imagine. In early Jan., I was impressed by one of these unrefusable offers and hurried down to the store so I could get first choice. What I found wasn't exactly what I had in mind.

EVALUATION

Finally, I asked two friends of mine, who teach subjects other than English in an inner city grade school, to read Mary's earlier pieces of writing and the newer ones, which were paired off appropriately (by similarities in mode and subject). The readers did not know which pieces in each pair were "before" or "after" writings. The early personal narrative about Guam was paired off with the new narrative about high school vs. college experience; the early essay on "Star Trek" was matched with the later essay on "All My Children"; the early personal narrative on dreams was paired off with the newer narrative on concert ads on radio; and an early piece on the purchase of Mary's first car was matched with the new piece on "buys" at department stores. I suggested that the two outside readers look for the following things when comparing the four pairs of pieces of writing: 1) according to their own criteria, they might determine which of the introductions, and subsequent pieces of writing, in each pair, was the best; 2) they could look for how the sense of contrast is dealt with in the introductions; 3) they might consider how the introductions are related to the bodies of the essays; 4) in their view, they could judge whether or not the introductions left the writer with ample points for discussion; 5) finally, they might look for whether an economy of expression was used, *i.e.*, precise words and concise phrases, rather than an excess of verbiage, such as repetitive words and phrases. Both readers judged the newer introductions (as well as the whole written pieces) better than the early ones in each of the four pairs, although only one of the readers wrote down his reasons for the choices. Outside of serving to confirm my own choices for the better introductions and helping me feel that my study did bring positive results, the evaluation done by the independent readers was not in as much depth as I had hoped for. The written remarks of the one reader barely touched on the more effective use of contrast in the introductions of the new pieces of writing:

In the introductions to the better essays a sense of contrast is developed by the use of impending irony, specifically the contrast of expectation vs. reality e.g. IIA: buying tapes at a sale turns out to be a ripoff, same with the advertising and the performance of a concert in IIIB.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the introductions to the new pieces of writing that Mary produced were improvements over her earlier efforts. They were more fully developed and more concisely phrased. They set forth the contrast clearly and provided an obvious direction for the rest of the piece. Mary's regard for introductions showed improvement, too, in that she exhibited new concern for making revisions in the introductions, in the interests of clarity and precision. I believe that now she has an idea of how to go about putting an introduction together, even if she doesn't always use all the steps (like note-taking) that we followed in the activities. Mary told me in our last session: "I don't know if I'm going to sit down and write little notes, but I'll think about it before I put it down." Although it is a modest and limited contribution to Mary's writing of essays and personal narratives (she was always well aware that contrast was the key to our study sessions; and, not every piece of writing that she will be asked to produce in the future will involve contrast), I believe that the development of her skill in clearly setting forth whatever contrast she intends to discuss in the piece in the introduction, was a significant step. It provided her with a series of deliberate steps (considering the contrast possibilities, experimenting with statements of the contrast, writing the introduction, and revising) to take in composing a meaningful introduction. It established in her own mind the value of a well-written introduction and seemed to facilitate her composing process. And, it produced some improved pieces of writing. Perhaps Mary will even be able to apply her methods of employing a heightened sense of contrast to other strategies in writing introductions to pieces of writing.

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[1]Lee Odell, "Responding to Student Writing," **College Composition and Communication**, (December, 1973), 394-400.

The Effect of Peer-Evaluated Student Compositions on Writing Improvement

Kathleen Bouton
Gary Tutty

In the editorial of the April issue of the *English Journal* Stephen Judy revives the discussion of the age-old problem of students' deficiency in writing ability. He cites four separate treatments on the subject dating as far back as 1892.[1] No matter how far back we go, the problem is the same—too many students cannot write effectively when they graduate from high school.

Despite the shift from written to oral communication in many high school English curriculums, we feel the students' need to express themselves in writing still exists. One possible solution to this inadequacy is for the student to learn to write by writing with conscientious guidance from the teacher. This guidance should include various forms of evaluation.

There are few English teachers who have not experienced the tedious chore of correcting and grading students' attempts at writing. What is even more frustrating than the papers themselves is the students' attitudes upon their return. Following assorted groans and sighs most students deposit them in the trash basket. Is there a point to all this pain on both sides of the desk? In "Notes Toward A Philosophy of Composition," the author states that:

> We seem to be almost compulsive in our desire to get students to produce papers with which we can punish ourselves. "Look how hard we work," we say, to our fellow teachers in other subjects. All our 'hard work' usually produces are a set of meaningless hieroglyphics or thudding abstractions that are either incomprehensible or totally irrelevant to what the student was attempting as he wrote. As long as we have produced marks on the students' papers our consciences are still. Until we learn that we cannot teach composition by correcting, we will never begin to develop a sound English program.[2]

It has not been proven that teacher-correction of students' papers leads to a marked improvement in students' writing. A study conducted in the fall of 1972 showed that if student writing was praised, it would improve, but inhibited performances would result if the writing was criticized or not commented upon at all.[3]

When one realizes that composition comprises one-third of the English curriculum of language, literature and composition, one is forc-

ed to recognize how much valuable time is wasted by both teacher and student alike in the usual mode of correction. It is time for an alternative to the usual process of grading.

Eileen Wagner in her article "How to Avoid Grading Compositions" poses the question: "What does such thoroughly justified grading do for the student?" Her answer is, of course, "Very little. Any grade short of 'A' tends to reinforce the student's 'I'm-not-okay' attitude toward composition."[4] She suggests that "students can grade each other's work, too. It is wise, however, to work out the standards by which papers will be graded in advance. Under conditions like these, the act of grading another student's writing can do more for the grader's composition skill than all the proofreading and style development exercises yet devised."[5]

With a variation of this idea in mind we instituted and evaluated a system of peer evaluation of compositions. The subjects of our study were two sophomore Regents classes at the Oneonta Senior High School in Oneonta, New York. This study covered the period from January to March, 1975, with students attending English class five periods weekly.

The homogeneity of both groups was assured by the results of a recently administered "School and College Ability Tests" (SCAT). Our experimental group consisted of twenty-six students, seventeen females and nine males with percentile rankings ranging from 9-16th to 95-97th. The control group was comprised of thirty students, sixteen females and fourteen males with percentile rankings from 13-24th to 99-100th.

As Wagner suggests in her article, we chose a standard for the students to evaluate by; it was the method suggested by Herman R. Struck in his book *Better Prose: A Method*.[6] We decided to use Struck's chart for "Testing Variety and Coherence in Sentence Openings" almost exclusively for determining the degree of improvement the groups had achieved from pre-test to post-test.

The percentages shown on this chart, as suggested by Struck, do not stand for the requirements of the ideal writer but reflect the trend that successful writers exhibit. This trend, therefore, would not be so bad for students to emulate.

The seven variables covered on Struck's chart are divided into subject and non-subject sentence openers by percentage as exhibited by successful writers. Nouns (30%) and pronouns (25%) comprise the subject-opener category. Non-subject openers include dependent clauses which Struck qualifies as those clauses which can be shifted from the beginning of the sentence to another position without changing the meaning or euphony of the sentence. Obviously such mobility lends itself to sentence variety. These should make up 6% of the sentence openers. The second non-subject opener is the prepositional phrase. This is probably the most common way of avoiding subject openers and should account for 13% of sentence openers. Adverbs should open 8% of the good writers' sentences.

Although possibly previously taught in elementary and junior high school a sentence should never begin with a coordinate conjunction, students wishing to emulate professional writers should begin 12% of their sentences with this part of speech. And finally, all other non-subject openers, including "there" (used as a filler word, not an adverb), verbs (imperative sentence), and verbals (those not used as subjects, i.e., it can be dropped from the sentence without changing the sentence's meaning.). Struck says of this chart, that the "results...are not final." Rather, "they illustrate both the aesthetic and the logical qualities of good prose."[7]

Our pre-test consisted of a five-hundred word composition stimulated by a lead-in sentence composed by the teacher. Only the first five hundred words were used for the percentages on Chart One.

In the ensuing weeks both classes were assigned weekly compositions along with other language arts activities. The papers of the control group were evaluated by the teacher who used the usual marginal comments and the letter-grading system. The papers of the experimental group were evaluated by each other after the teacher had familiarized them with the use of Struck's Chart 1, Chart 2 (Empty Nouns and Weak Verbs), and Chart 5 (Guide for Criticism).

At the conclusion of the experimental period both groups took the post-test. This consisted of a five hundred word composition chosen from several topics offered by the teacher. Again, only the first five hundred words were evaluated using Chart 1. There were several interesting and promising results.

The University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire T-Tests for Related Measures (May, 1972 version) was used for measuring the results.

Our null hypothesis stated that the improvement in the writing of the experimental group would equal the improvement in the writing of the control group. According to our comparison of the mean scores for each variable there were three areas of positive improvement for both groups with the experimental group improving slightly more than the control group. On the other hand, there were two areas of slight decline or negative improvement. But in each of these cases the experimental group declined less than the control group. For the final variable the experimental group exhibited a positive improvement while the control group declined slightly. While neither group improved in every area, the experimental group had a higher incidence of improvement for the duration of the program in peer evaluation.

What implications does this study have for the English teacher? Assume that neither the experimental nor the control group experienced improvement or decline. Why then should the teacher spend hours of frustration poring over students' papers when the time could be spent more effectively in some other area? For example, during this test the teacher-corrector spent on the average three and one-half hours on one set of thirty papers. Multiply this by the normal class load of an English

teacher and the time spent marking and grading becomes outrageously high. This figure becomes even more ridiculous when we examine the little effect that the teachers' corrections have on the overall improvement of the students' writing.

On the other hand, if the students evaluate each others' papers they will take somewhat more interest in their "corrected" papers than if the teacher does it.[8] Furthermore, using Struck's Charts 1 (Testing Variety and Coherence in Sentence Openings), 2 (Empty Nouns and Weak Verbs) and 5 (Guide for Criticism) the students can complete the evaluation of their peer's paper in approximately one class period. Although their corrections may not be as professional as the teacher's they will be much more thorough, and in most cases, much more constructive. And one class period is a small price to pay for three to four hours of teacher time which reaps very few benefits for the students.

Neil Ellman, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction of the Rahway, New Jersey Public Schools, believes that in order for a student to become an independent learner he must be taught the skills necessary for self and peer-evaluation. "Because such evaluation is considerably less threatening, many students who react negatively to criticism from their teachers are more willing to accept it from their peers."[9]

From working with the students during the study and arriving at the results from it we agree with Ellman when he concludes that

> peer evaluation can be carried on in a sensible and effective way. An individual can receive constructive criticism without having his self-esteem damaged, and he can learn to give purposeful and humane criticism. Indeed, individuals can learn the most difficult task of all—to give and accept praise graciously.[10]

We are not implying that the teacher should put down the correcting pen and rely totally on peer evaluation. What we are saying is that peer evaluation combined with occasional teacher corrections accompanied by short student-teacher conferences is a much more valuable and constructive way to evaluate student's papers. And it takes less time.

Oneonta

NOTES

[1]Stephen Judy, "Who Resurrected Bonehead English?," **English Journal**, LXIV, April, 1975, p. 6.

[2]"Notes Toward A Philosophy of Composition," Fairfield Public Schools, Fairfield, Conn., July, 1967, pp. 23-24.

[3]Thomas C. Gee, "Students' Responses to Teachers' Comments," **Research in the Teaching of English**, VI, Fall 1972, pp. 212-21.

[4]Eileen N. Wagner, "How To Avoid Grading Compositions," **English Journal**, LXIV, March, 1975, p. 77.

[5]**Ibid.**

[6]Herman R. Struck, **Better Prose: A Method**, Houghton Mifflin, Co., Boston, 1965, p. 3.

[7]**Ibid.**, p. 21.

[8]It is interesting to note that only two students failed to do and hand in the post-test. Both of these students had medical excuses. On the other hand, five students from the group of thirty students in the control group failed to complete and hand in the post-test. Only one of these students had a legal excuse for not handing in the paper on the assigned day.

[9]Neil Ellman, "Peer Evaluation and Peer Grading," **English Journal**, LXIV, March, 1975, p. 79.

[10]Ellman, p. 80.

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COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORES OF VARIABLES

GROUP	Nouns	Pronouns	Dep. Clause	Prep. Phrase	Adverbs	Coor. Conj.	("there" Misc. verbals verbs)
EXPERIMENTAL	Pretest -2.97 Post -8.34 Negative Improvement 5.37 t=1.881 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. 11.08 Post 2.72 Positive Improvement 8.36 t=2.114 significant at the 2.00 level	Post 3.54 Pre. 2.32 Negative Improvement 1.22 t=0.651 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. -9.78 Post -3.93 Positive Improvement 5.85 t=3.645 significant at the 2.00 level	Post 4.57 Pre. 4.45 Negative Improvement .12 t=0.044 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. -6.40 Post -2.24 Positive Improvement 4.16 t=1.836 significant at the 2.00 level	Post .76 Pre. -0.31 Negative Improvement -1.07 t=0.646 significant at the 2.00 level
CONTROL	Pretest 2.53 Post -3.45 Negative Improvement 5.98 t=1.010 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. 15.06 Post 7.54 Positive Improvement 7.52 t=1.788 significant at the 2.00 level	Post 4.43 Pre. -0.98 Negative Improvement 5.41 t=4.333 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. -9.61 Post -5.05 Positive Improvement 4.56 t=3.023 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. 2.57 Post .08 Positive Improvement 2.49 t=1.226 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. -9.84 Post -6.61 Positive Improvement 3.23 t=2.719 significant at the 2.00 level	Pre. -0.10 Post 1.83 Negative Improvement 1.93 t=1.010 significant at the 2.00 level
COMPARISON	Negative Improvement of E over C 5.37 5.98	Positive Improvement of E over C 8.36 7.52	Negative Improvement of E over C 1.22 5.41	Positive Improvement of E over C 5.85 4.56	C-great Positive Improvement E-slight neg. improve	Positive Improvement of E over C 4.16 3.23	Negative Improvement of E over C 1.07 1.93

Misconceptions Some Pupils Have About Remedial Reading & Themselves

by Jerome Axelrod

1. If I make mistakes when I read aloud, I am stupid. (After all, why are the other kids laughing at me?) Smart people get things right. So, dumb kids get things wrong. Also, the more I get wrong, the dumber I must be.
2. If I make mistakes when I read aloud, I am naughty. I'm not doing what the teacher wants and has taught me, which is to read these words aloud correctly.
3. If I ask questions I'm showing my stupidity and helplessness. After all, good readers don't ask many questions. So I'll hide my stupidity by not asking questions.
4. My black English is wrong. The teacher's English is right and if I try to talk like her my language will be better.
5. The purpose of all tests is to find out how smart you are.
6. Tests are for finding out if you passed or failed whatever it is that's being tested.
7. A cheated score on a test is really my score.
8. If I skip the reading story and go right to the questions below the story and look up the right answers, that'll be good enough. This way I won't have to read the boring paragraphs but will be able to get the answers right and be the first one done.
9. The best reader is the first one done with the reading assignment.
10. Saying the words aloud correct is reading.

The first four items are ego-related. Items 5, 6 and 7 deal with testing, the last three with the reading process itself. They are discussed below individually.

EGO-RELATED MISCONCEPTIONS

Kids are touted as being very perceptive. Sometimes they are *too* perceptive and see things that are not really there. For example, many disabled readers believe in the oft-true, oft-untrue notion that the in-

ability to read is an overt symbol of stupidity. Their thinking here is reinforced by their observations that the "dumbest" kids in the room are poor readers. Unfortunately, their association of slow-mindedness with reading disability is too often true. But their assumption that this association is *always* true is incorrect. They should be made to realize that many intelligent people cannot read or read well and that many slower learners can read quite well. More importantly, kids should be taught that when a person has a reading problem, most times he has no more than that; that his problem is not one of "dumbness"; that the thought of getting "special" help in reading via small groups of reading centers is not some euphemistic way of saying, "For dumb kids only."

Item one: if a disabled reader associates his disability of illiteracy with a defect in intellect, it is often impossible to dislodge that notion from his thinking. But there are several things a teacher can do to alleviate the problem: 1) engage the class more often in silent reading rather than in "round robin." Reading authorities have long recognized the superiority of silent reading to oral and, moreover, doing so gives the class less chance to embarrass a pupil reading aloud; 2) more importantly, teach the concept that mistakes are not necessarily traits of people of lower intelligence and that mistakes are made by all people, the smart and the not-so-smart; 3) teach the idea that to laugh at other people for their mistakes is to laugh at oneself, for everyone makes mistakes at some time and "if you don't want to be laughed at, don't laugh at anyone else."

If item one is a partial misconception (i.e. some non-readers *do* possess lower intelligence quotients), item two is a *total* misconception. If a pupil considers himself "bad" for making mistakes, it is often caused by his hearing something like, "Now, Joey, we went over this work in class. You should know it by now" or, worse: "Mary will you please read that sentence again—in English this time." Misconception number two is caused by instilling guilt in the child or by using mockery. The point here is that children rarely come to school feeling they are naughty or bad if they err. They usually "learn" it in school. What teachers may do is to take the tenseness out of the child's learning to read and to impart the truth that the making of mistakes is a human quality.

Item three: some pupils working silently at their desks on a reading assignment will *never* ask the teacher questions no matter how much difficulty they are having with their work. One reason they avoid asking for help is the fear of looking stupid or helpless in the other kids' eyes. A means of disspelling such a notion is to inform the class before beginning an assignment that the smartest people usually ask the *most* questions: "That's how they get so smart." The teacher can also invite the class to ask questions, claiming that is what she is there for. Most importantly, children must learn that by not asking questions, they do not learn.

Misconception four is the traditional linguistic variation of the white-is-right theme. Too many students still believe there is only one

correct way to speak English—a "standard" way, the teacher's way or the white way. For years linguists have tried with some success to convince teachers that there is no "wrong" language nor a "wrong" way to emit it. What is wrong is in viewing language as a caste system with varying levels or grades and in imposing these views onto children who eventually come to feel their language and speech are superior or inferior to others. (Boratz & Shuy, 1969; Dillard, 1972.)

TESTING MISCONCEPTIONS

Misconception five is learned when students are not sufficiently made aware of why they are being tested. Less than five percent of all the tests most pupils will take in their school years will be intelligence tests, yet they still believe that tests are given to find out how smart they are. One suggestion here would be for teachers to make clear to their pupils the reasons they are taking a particular test, what it is the test is supposed to measure, what it is it does *not* measure, and that tests are not always correct in measuring what it is they are supposed to evaluate.

The causes for the sixth misconception are the same as for the fifth, namely that teachers do not inform kids as to what tests are all about. Pupils, moreover, think of tests in terms of passing or failing or of getting good grades or bad in them. They learn this sometimes-true sometimes-false misconception by being given teacher-made test after test in which they *do* receive a grade or pass-fail mark. Pupils should learn that the purpose of tests is to measure and not always or even primarily to determine a grade or whether they "passed" or not. Finally, kids should realize that no test measures a person's worth.

As for the seventh misconception, many students feel that if they have "successfully" cheated on a test that the cheated score is really *their* score; that the cheating is no more than a means to that end and that the cheating is in fact unrelated to their unduly inflated (or deflated) score. The source of these delusions lies in the teacher's failure to explain or explain convincingly the meaning of tests and the effects of cheating. Children should understand that cheating—even a little bit of it— ruins the effectiveness of tests and does not tell the pupil how he is doing in a particular school area. Of course there are some children who are aware of the negative effects of cheating but who cheat anyhow either for the sake of getting away with something—anything—or who do not wish to reveal how "stupid" they are. Pupils who cheat for the sake of cheating should be made to realize the words in the extremely worn cliche, "You're only cheating yourselves," meaningless as these words may be to some children. For those students who cheat in order to hide what they consider to be a defect in their intelligence or character, kids should learn that no test adequately tests "smartness," personality or worth.

Item eight concerns the reading of paragraphs and answering questions based on their content. Axelrod (1974) notes that "Some pupils—or perhaps all pupils sometimes—skip the story they are to read and go right to the questions." Remedies to this problem may include (1)

making the stories more interesting; (2) including many inferential questions. Answers to inferential questions are not stated in the story but are found "between the lines." Consistently and successfully answering inferential questions necessitates reading and understanding the story as a whole; (3) teaching the concept that "We want to find out how well you read, not how clever or slick you can be in answering the questions." If the pupil absorbs this idea, the teacher need not heed the two suggestions preceding this one.

The ninth misconception deals with a pupil's association of the reading task with sprinting: the fastest is the best. Some pupils are never convinced that the "fastest" word-caller in the room or the first one done a reading assignment is not necessarily the best and the brightest. If kids want to believe in the analogy between reading and running they should be directed to consider the fable of the race between the tortoise and the hare: the winner was the steady and careful creature, not the hasty and arrogant one.

The last misconception is perhaps the only one that exists almost always because of misteaching. For, if not, then where else did the pupil learn to make synonymous the words "decoding" and "reading." Teachers insufficiently grounded in reading methodology should learn, among other things, that decoding or sounding out a word correctly is only one part of the reading process. The other ingredients are comprehension, critical analysis, vocabulary and study skills. To decode without comprehending is *not* reading. A teacher who is happy over a pupil's emitting words in sentences aloud with the stresses, pitches and junctures in the right places is deceiving herself if she thinks the pupil is reading—unless he is displaying an understanding of what he is decoding. A worse situation exists if the teacher is sufficiently grounded in reading but avoids teaching comprehension skills because she feels they are hard to teach—which they are. Instead, she passes the children on, with deceivingly good grades in language arts, hoping the next year's teacher will teach these skills. Well, unless some teacher does do the dirty work of teaching the needed skills, the pupils will continue to verbalize (i.e. decode without comprehending) and to deceive themselves about their reading ability.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The longer a pupil maintains misconceptions and delusions about himself and his reading ability, the longer it takes to extirpate them.

2. Some misconceptions have been so indelibly (and often bitterly) ingrained in many pupils' minds that their extermination will never occur.

3. Pupils' misconceptions can be started by teachers, reinforced by teachers or have nothing to do with teachers. The origins of these misbeliefs lies as often in the school years as in the preschool years.

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Themes Of Violence In Picture Books

by Karen Harris

The literary taboo is practically extinct. It is quickly following the dodo and the whooping crane into eternal oblivion. If you don't believe me, check tonight's amusement pages. What was formerly available only in rather grainy 8mm film shown at private parties, is now available on wide screen, in glorious color and accessible to anyone who can do a passing fair imitation of a seventeen year old.

Virtually anything can be set in type nowadays—and is. You can find it prominently displayed at your local newstand. The traditional liberal argument against censorship maintains that an adult should be able to read anything and that his reading matter should not be determined by what is suitable fare for a thirteen year old. Such a position is unassailable although its converse might well be challenged: should what is suitable, or at least desired by an adult, be found in the literature of thirteen year olds?

It is possible that we have gone from a ludicrous overprotection of all of society to providing no protection at all. The content of junior fiction has altered drastically in the past few years. Not too long ago fiction for young people rarely ever produced a character who was sufficiently provoked to utter the word "damn." Rarely did anyone ever smoke or drink or swear or speak with grammatical carelessness. Characters conducted their lives well within the professed value system of small-town, middle-class America. Family members provided each other with strong emotional support, people were clearly identifiable as "good" or "bad," socially created problems were easily solved when the "good" person was located who could put things right. Serious conflicts, when they appeared, were amenable to simplistic solutions. The real crisis in the life of a migrant worker's child is passed when his family is given permission to take up residence in an abandoned bus.[1] Racial discrimination dissolves when "good" people get to work on the problem. The unwed mother, though more to be pitied than censured, paid a terrible price for her one mistake (usually made under the unaccustomed influence of liquor). Her tragic tale served as a warning for any tempted young girl, though society was condemned for its callous attitude toward the innocent child.

Well, times have changed. Stories about pre-marital sex abound. Although most are frankly condemnatory, and one *Bonnie Jo, Go Home*[2] grotesquely chronicles the incredible horrors a young girl endures as she seeks an abortion, one at least, *Mom, the Wolf Man and Me*[3] seems to think pre-marital sex rather a good idea. *I'll Get There, It Better*

Be Worth the Trip[4] relates a brief homosexual incident between two young boys. *The Outsiders*[5] concerns gang violence. *Dorp Dead*[6] and *The Planet of Junior Brown*[7] have characters who are clearly severely emotionally disturbed, in the former case frankly sadistic. Stories of alienation and rejection are too numerous to list. The world of drugs has emerged as a major theme during the past five years. Thus topics and attitudes once taboo are now standard fare. On balance, and despite some really terrible books in the field, the new openness is probably a positive development. Too many of our children must cope with a world which is more traumatizing than anything available in their literature. Stories of more innocent times and more gentle folk don't reflect their world and offer few insights and scarce relief.

While the new realism offers much to the middle and high school student it is probable that we should be more protective of the young child. Admittedly life is earnest and life is real, but could not some of the earnestness and the more threatening aspects of reality be deferred for a while at least? Recently several picture books have appeared which have acts of violence as a central theme. It can be claimed that violence exists in the best of children's stories. After all, the wicked witch in Hansel and Gretel is shoved into the oven and presumably cooked to a cinder. The wolf who pursued the three little pigs drops through the chimney and into a cauldron of boiling water. The giant chases Jack down the beanstalk, falls and is killed. All violence ends, but in most versions dealt with in one sentence. Violence is neither the focus nor a major theme of the story; it is rather the evidence of a rather crude justice and a neat way of tying up loose ends.

The incidence of violence in some contemporary picture books for young children is startlingly different. The quantity, the treatment, and the importance it has suggests such books might be subjected to further evaluation.

Bang, Bang You're Dead[8] is a story of a group of children playing war. They meet regularly at a hill and pretend to shoot and be shot. After play, they leave together, friends as before. After all, it is just a game. One day a new group of kids show up. They claim the hill for their own and the two factions decide to meet the next day and fight it out. They meet, armed with sticks and stones, prepared for battle.

"There were screams, yells, blood and pain. It was awful. There was a terrible moaning and groaning. James looked around. No one was fighting. They all lay hurting."

"This isn't any fun," observes one of the more astute characters. All agree. Apparently such behavior is not the most judicious way to settle their differences. All decide, rather piously, not to fight, but to share the hill when they play war. "Real war?" asks one character. "No, you know," said James. "Bang, Bang, You're Dead."

The moral is clear: don't fight. Settle your differences peacefully. The jacket blurb claims that the book "simply and effectively presents a

child's first discovery of the reality of war." The publisher, representative of a profession never known for modesty, is making rather too strong a case. He may confuse the various versions of cops and robbers with real war, but few children do. The book does purport to be a plea for peace on the neighborhood, if not the global level. What then can be objectionable? In a twenty-nine page book there are nine pages and over thirty individual sketches of fighting or bruised and bleeding children. For a book which promotes peace, there does seem to be an excessive dwelling upon and depiction of pain and violence.

The appearance of violence in *The Beast of Monsieur Racine*[9] is handled very differently. The story is of a retired tax collector who finds pears are stolen from his tree. He determines to catch the culprit who turns out to be a strange beast. The two become friends. M. Racine studies the beast, a creature previously unknown to science whose discovery generates great excitement. M. Racine is invited to address the academy of scientists. During his speech the beast begins to giggle uncontrollably, throws off its outer skin and reveals itself as two small children who have hidden in this costume as a joke. Their jest creates a riot in the gallery and among the crowds waiting outside. M. Racine, however, finds their prank very amusing and he and the children remain friends.

The text is simple and mildly amusing. The author pokes fun at the solemnity and pompousness of learned societies and celebrates the friendship his hero has exchanged for his former solitude. But the illustrations tell a very different story. When M. Racine first encounters the beast and again when the two are picnicing, a bloody axe appears stuck in a tree stump. A fox runs by with a live rabbit in his mouth. In other pictures a hobo enters the scene with a severed foot in a sack; a cage falls, apparently soon to crush two men; a porter walks through a train station carrying a trunk, dripping blood, a skull and crossbones painted on the front; a fire breaks out on stage during the speech at the academy; a man topples over exposing his artificial leg; a blind man raises his white cane in rage; outside a man breaks a chair over a woman's head; a woman jabs her artificial arm into a man's mouth, a man points to an umbrella jammed into his head; a policeman points to his empty coat sleeve—his hand is missing; a crowd deliberately overturns a bus.

The pictures as well as the narration are lighthearted and frivolous, although the tone of the book is humorous, the illustrations portray the real world out of control, a situation especially threatening to the young child. This is not the world of fantasy; there are no witches, ogres, or giants. These are human beings behaving in aggressive, hostile, and murderous ways—and the young reader is invited to share in the fun.

In *Through the Window*[10] there is only one incident of violence, but one is quite enough. What is significant in this book is not so much the violence, but the main character's response to it. Joseph watches events on the street from his front window. An old woman lives down the street

with her dog. One day the horses from a nearby brewery get loose and come galloping down the street. After they pass the old woman picks up her dog who lies limp in her arms. The old woman is bent over, apparently in sorrow. People on the street gesture toward her helplessly. Joseph observes all this. He breathes on the window and in the mist his breath creates he draws a stick figure of a woman carrying a dog in her arms—and they are both grinning from ear to ear.

It should be noted that this is a picture book for the very young child. It is listed in standard reference tools as suited to a child from kindergarten to third grade. How can such a young child possibly interpret this kind of bizarre response? Is Joseph denying the death of the dog? Is he indicating happiness in spite of, or possibly because of the dog's death? What value is there in such a book?

The Hunter, The Tick and the Gumberoo[11] relates the tale of a hunter who tracks the gumberoo, a fierce and ferocious animal. During his search he sees a rabbit and a quail, both of which he shoots. Soon he feels an itch on the side of his face. A leathery lump begins to grow there. The lump encompasses the tick which increases enormously in size, devours the hunter's game and demands more. The hunter becomes desperate and determines to destroy this monstrous thing.

> The hunter had no way of knowing where to aim for now the tick seemed larger than a bear, with a thick round leathery body that mushroomed like a dark cloud over him.
>
> Trembling, he raised his rifle and tried with all his skill to take careful aim and fire.
>
> Some time later, two hunters happened to cross the ground where the body of a man lay, clutching a rifle in his hand. He had two rabbits and a quail tied to his belt, a bullet hole through the center of his head, and on the side of his face was a speck-like, brown wood tick.

That man destroys his own life in the relentless destruction of wildlife is a tenable position and a theme suitable for a child's book. Whether it should be presented to the young reader through the vivid imagery of a particularly horrible suicide is certainly questionable.

The human child is born with the potential for aggression, cruelty and violence; he is also born with the capacity for kindness, gentleness, and compassion; which characteristics will develop and predominate depend on the totality of his experiences. The direct, personal experiences are certainly the most formative, but the indirect, vicarious experiences also shape and mold his value system and behavioral patterns. The popular culture is replete with instances of the glorification of violence; it is hoped that the child's earliest literary experiences might contribute to a counterbalancing, humanizing effect.

New Orleans, Louisiana

FOOTNOTES

[1]Shotwell, Louise. **Roosevelt Grady**, New York: World, 1963.

[2]Everly, Janet. **Bonnie Jo, Go Home**, New York: Lippincott, 1972.

[3]Klein, Norma. **Mom, The Wolf Man and Me**. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

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[6]Cunningham, Julia. **Dorp Dead**. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

[7]Hamilton, Virginia. **The Planet of Jr. Brown**. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

[8]Pitzhugh, Louise and Sandra Scoppettone. **Bang, Bang, You're Dead**. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

[9]Ungerer, Tomi. **The Beast of Monsieur Racine**. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971.

[10]Kerping, Charles. **Through the Window**. New York: Franklin Watts, 1970.

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Teaching The Central Idea — An Inductive Approach

John A. Higgins

I am still surprised at the number of high school upperclassmen and college freshmen who treat the notion that one must form a central idea before writing as a revelation—and not a pleasant one. "We never had to do that before" is a common plaint; "I'm not trying to make a point; I just want to tell what I know about the topic" is another. These are the students who produce an *about* paper—all *about* this or that, in the older sense of the word: in circuit, around the outside. But even those who understand that a paper should develop a central idea often do not know how to phrase such an idea so that it will guide them to the point they are trying to make.

I suggest the following short, three-step unit, suitable for either the senior high or college freshman level, to teach effective central ideas. The first step conveys the need to conceive of a paper as the development of a central idea; the second, the way to write a genuine central idea; and the third, the way to write an effective one. To make these concepts a part of the student's writing habits, the teacher must move inductively, not stating the concepts but leading the students to discover them. Since the principle of the central idea is the same for both paragraphs and longer themes even though the traditional terms—topic sentence and thesis sentence—are different, the teacher can begin with single paragraphs and then apply the principle to longer papers.

In the first step, the teacher gives the students, without any comment, two short selections to read. To insure a truly inductive experience, he does not even announce the topic of the lesson. I use two selections from Charles Lindbergh's *The Spirit of St. Louis*[1]. The first is a ten-sentence paragraph beginning with a clearly stated central idea ("A pilot doesn't feel at home in a plane until he's flown it for thousands of miles"-p. 191) and developed by examples. However, the second selection, though also presented in paragraph form, is actually the following random collection of sentences from various parts of the book, having no central idea at all.

> Haze thickens behind me until the coastline becomes lost. I know now what my father meant when he warned me, years ago, of depending too heavily on others. The earth-inductor compass needle leans right. How much ice has accumulated on the plane? Can those be the same stars? I've lost command of my eyelids. The very instability which makes it difficult to fly blind or hold an accurate course at night now guards me against excessive errors. I'd almost forgotten the moon. I glance at the chart on my lap. Maybe the steady periods aren't caused by the magnets pointing toward the pole. Here, it's two o'clock in the morning.

To lead the students to see that one selection makes sense because it has a central idea whereas the other does not because it lacks one, the teacher asks each student to complete these statements: "The writer of Selection 1 is showing us that _____" and "The writer of Selection 2 is showing us that _____." When several answers are read, the class usually discovers that though there is consensus on the central idea of Selection 1, there is none on Selection 2; and when asked to circle in each selection a sentence which states what the selection is trying to show and to which all other sentences relate, the students find that they cannot do it for Selection 2. Yet, the teacher asks Socratically, aren't both selections *about* the same subject, Lindbergh's flying his plane?

Thus the class discovers the difference between merely dumping on paper random dredged-up thoughts *about* a topic, and developing a central idea. Practice follows in locating the central idea sentences in paragraphs or longer pieces of writing including the students' own previous papers, and in providing central ideas for paragraphs whose central idea sentences have been removed, such as this:

My Brother Charlie

_____

_____

_____

He puts mustard on his poached eggs. He paints yellow polka-dots on his green car. Once after reading about how college students used to swallow live goldfish, he tried to gulp down a live caterpillar. Another time he poured catsup all over his chest and staggered into a hospital emergency room; he spent a night in jail for that. His latest idea is to stand outside supermarkets wearing a Little Orphan Annie wig, soliciting money for air fare to find Daddy Warbucks.

When the students have grasped what a central idea is and why a written statement of one is needed before even outlining can begin, they are next guided to form central idea statements that truly contain an idea rather than a mere restatement of the topic such as "My central idea is juvenile delinquency" or "My central idea is what causes juvenile delinquency." In teaching how to phrase the central idea statement to achieve this goal, the teacher dwells on two key words. The first is *show*, as opposed to *tell*. The central idea is a statement of what the writer will *show* the reader in his paper. *Tell* tends to make students revert to thinking of writing randomly *about; show*, on the other hand, conveys a need for supporting the central idea with facts or logic in the body of the paper.

Again without comment, the teacher hands out dittoed sheets containing hypothetical student attempts at writing a central idea, such as the following set for a paper comparing today's movie heroes with those of the 1930's and '40's.

Student A: In this paper I will discuss movie heroes.

Student B: In this paper I will compare recent movie heroes with those of the '30's and '40's.

Student C: In this paper I will show how today's movie heroes compare with heroes of the '30's and '40's.

Student D: In this paper I will show that today's movie heroes are less exciting than the heroes of the '30's and '40's.

What, the teacher asks, does each of these tell us that we do not *already* know from words of the given topic? He should have little trouble eliciting from the students that B merely restates the topic and that A says even less, so that neither statement is a central idea at all. He may find it more difficult to make the class see why C's statement is not a central idea, since she uses the word *show*. He asks, "According to C's central idea, how *do* today's heroes compare with earlier ones?" C, of course, does not state how; she merely uses a noun clause which, because it begins with *how*, makes her think she has stated how.

Student D, then, is the only one who really states what he will show in his paper. "What one word," the teacher next asks, "did D use that the others didn't, which *forced* him to make a complete statement on the topic?" The answer, the word *that*, is the second key to writing effective central idea statements. Using the formula "In this paper I will show that . . ." compels the student to complete the statement with a subject-verb structure—in other words, with an idea. (In my classes, every student must have his central idea approved before beginning to organize each major paper, and every central idea must use the discovered formula. No central idea statement is accepted without the word *that*.)

Follow-up practice consists of the teacher's presenting topics for which the students are asked to write central idea statements using the "I will show that . . ." formula. Almost any topics will do, as long as each allows several possible central ideas, as do "Quota hiring of minorities and women," "American sports and money," and "Honesty and success." Students can also rework some of their old themes, improving defective central ideas or supplying missing ones.

Peer-group evaluation, another effective inductive technique, can be added to this practice by having the students circulate their completed papers around the room. The first reader of a paper writes on a separate sheet what she thinks was the writer's central idea, and attaches it beneath the paper. The paper is then passed on to several other readers, who each do the same without looking at the previous attachments. When the writer reclaims his own paper he discovers through objective evidence from his peers whether average readers (not just the nitpicking teacher) were able to see the central idea he intended.

The final phase of the unit leads the students to improve the content of their central idea statements by eliminating vagueness, double ideas and other weaknesses. Always the approach is inductive. The teacher asks; he does not tell. Now he presents a series of central idea statements of varying specificity. The class attempts to discover which will best guide its writer through his paper. Here is such a series on the topic "The future of the automobile in America":

Student E: In this paper I will show that in the next few years the American people's tastes in cars will change.

Student F: In this paper I will show that in the next few years most Americans will turn to smaller cars.

Student G: In this paper I will show that in the next few years most Americans will turn to smaller cars because of the high cost of fuel.

Guided by the teacher's questions, the class discovers that G's statement tells most specifically what the paper will show.

Other possible weaknesses in central ideas can be similarly shown, such as trying to squeeze a whole outline into the statement or writing statements with two distinct ideas. Finally, the teacher uses an exercise like the following to measure each student's comprehension of the total central idea concept. Every statement except 7, 9 and 10 either is vague or contains more than one idea. Each student writes a satisfactory version of each statement he considers weak, inventing additional information where necessary.

1. In this paper I will discuss my attitude toward equal rights for homosexuals.
2. In this paper I will show how an LSD trip affects a person.
3. In this paper I will give my opinion of the novel "The House on Glansvere Moor."
4. In this paper I will show that growing up in a ghetto affects your whole life.
5. In this paper I will show that radio can be more entertaining than television and radio commercials costs the sponsor less than television commercials.
6. In this paper I will show that I can look back on memories of spending a weekend at my grandfater's when I was a child and still remember my feelings.
7. In this paper I will show that experiencing the birth of a second child is no less thrilling than experiencing the birth of the first.
8. In this paper I will show that school buildings should be designed to accommodate handicapped people because such people are equally entitled to an education, they often do better than non-handicapped students, education will make them productive members of society, and they will be able to share in the fun of school life.
9. In this paper I will show that because they tell us always to use the word *he* when a person's sex is unknown, grammar book writers are male chauvinists.
10. In this paper I will show that Senator Flinch's legislative record will earn him re-election this year.

The real test, of course, is the students' subsequent writing of paragraphs and longer themes. Toward the end of the unit the teacher can have the class discover, by examining several well-written student

papers or professional essays, that the central idea statement (now shorn of the words "In this paper I will show that") can occupy different positions within the paper or merely be implied.

The goals of this unit have been to make the students aware of the need to think of a topic as the development of a central idea; to enable them to phrase a central idea statement in a form that guarantees an idea rather than a mere restatement of the topic; and to enable them to write specific, single-focus ideas that will guide them undeviatingly through their papers. The key instrument to achieve these goals is the formula statement built around the words *show that*.

Later units can move into paragraph development: teaching adequate reinforcement of the central idea, distinguishing central from subordinate ideas, and holding to the central idea. But in the unit described here, the foundation will have been laid for making subsequent student writing easier and better—which is the composition teacher's central idea.

Jamaica

FOOTNOTE

[1]New York: Scribner's, 1953.

The Opening Three Chapters of 'The Great Gatsby'

by Robert Emmet Long

One of the effective methods of teaching a novel in a classroom is to give close attention to the introduction—the opening chapter or chapters which often tell us much more than they seem to at first glance. There are certain works in particular, and *The Great Gatsby* is one of them, where an enormous amount is going on beneath what appears to be a very clear and simple surface. In *The Great Gatsby*, the three opening chapters, sharply differentiated from each other, work together as a single unit. On the most rudimentary level, they serve as exposition. All of the principals appear at the beginning, and the reader is introduced to their backgrounds and situations as they are defined by the three distinct social spheres to which they belong—East Egg, with its affluence and perogatives; the valley of ashes, where the lower middle class have a hazy existence; and West Egg, an upper middle class suburb, some of whose residents represent new money. By the end of these opening chapters, we know the several worlds that are to be explored; their distinctness has been established, and they are like the motifs of a musical composition announced at the opening. It remains to be seen how they will interact, and what will come of their doing so, the uncertainty of which compels us further into the work.

These opening chapters should be observed closely, since they have been composed so that their settings reveal the characters. A pattern may be discerned, too, insofar as a social occasion or social gathering takes place in each. In the first chapter, it is a social call by invitation; the occasion is exclusive, and limited to a single individual who qualifies. Carraway is not a member of the Buchanans's set, having nothing like their wealth, but he is acceptable because of his background. He is a second cousin, once removed, of Daisy, and had been a classmate of Tom's, and a member of the same senior society, at Yale. The time is established by Daisy's remarking that "in two weeks it'll be the longest day of the year," so that it must be nearly the middle of June which, as we will discover later, is the same time of year when Daisy married Tom. As Carraway arrives, the sense of place is very pronounced. He finds a red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion which Tom has acquired from the oil man, Demaine; its architecture suggests an early America, but the ownership of the estate passing to Demaine, and from him to Tom Buchanan, indicates the solid money it now represents. (The house is thus, also, an early comment on what has happened to America.) Buchanan's wealth is established in the opening pages. "He'd brought

down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest," Carraway tells us, adding that "it was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that." When Carraway reaches their estate, he is greeted by Buchanan, seen in a proprietary posture, as, in the swank of a riding outfit, he stands solidly "with his legs apart on the porch."

Inside there is an atmosphere that is both gracious and disturbing. Upon his arrival into their living-room, under "the frosted wedding cake of the ceiling," Carraway finds Daisy and Jordan Baker seated on a sofa, both wearing white dresses which stir in a breeze moving through the room, creating an almost idyllic impression. At the same time, however, together with the sound of the whip and snap of the curtains, he hears "the groan of a picture on the wall." Then Tom appears, shutting the window with a bang, and the vision flies apart, the young women appearing to balloon down from what has seemed a cloud. This opening impression is in small what the whole chapter will be. Impressions of Daisy and Jordan which follow are conveyed through "gestures" almost entirely, and are seen in Daisy's enchantment-promising voice, and Jordan's elaborate attitudes of self sufficiency. There is quite an amusing moment when Carraway is introduced to Jordan, whose poise gives her the appearance of balancing an invisible object on her chin. "At any rate," Carraway says, "Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly, and then quickly tipped her head back again—the object she was balancing had obviously tottered a little and given her something of a fright." Both Daisy and Jordan have an aura about them of understandings they share but which are inaccessible to an outsider. These attitudes are indicative of the "secret" world of wealth to which they belong. At one point Daisy tells a story about their butler, who had worked long hours cleaning the silver of a wealthy family until at last the silver cleaning affected his nose and he had to leave his position. There is in this story an intimation of something malodorous about the rich, and on another level this is seen in the privileged world of the Buchanans, which is not without charm, but is also unpleasant.

For the "superior" world in which they live is full of tensions, communicated by gestures that are not attached to genuine emotions, and by inuendoes which imply something disagreeable. At one point, Tom says: "Oh, I'll stay in the East, don't you worry," and then glances at Daisy, and back at Carraway, "as if he were alert for something more." An impression is given that the Buchanans may have left Chicago over some unpleasantness relating to Tom's infidelity. His infidelity comes out that afternoon with a "shrill metallic ring" of the telephone, and we learn that Tom has "some woman." Tom is, of course, a horseman, and in one passage, comically, it is suggested that he has this other woman "in his stable." At the point where he mentions his stables, the telephone rings again, and the group is frozen in tense silence. The gracious appearances dissolve into discords, and a sense of a deep disquiet beneath the surface, as Carraway leaves—already feeling a sense of "confusion" and even some disgust. He returns to his cottage (a movement

from gesture toward emotion) where, across the darkness, he detects the figure of the man he will later know as Gatsby, his arms outstretched toward a distant green light. He is as yet a shadowy figure, but Fitzgerald has already hinted at some depth of feeling in him that is antithetical to the group Carraway had left at East Egg, particularly that figure of chronic inconstancy, Tom Buchanan.

Like chapter one, chapter two communicates much of its meaning through the use of scene. The first chapter leads into the second by the telephone call from Myrtle, "the fifth guest," but otherwise the transition is a study in contrasts, from great wealth to bare subsistence—to a land of ashes and powdery shapes, which may be buildings or men, but are all equally indistinct. Presiding over this land of exhaustion is George Wilson, who runs a garage and filling station, and is described as spiritless and anaemic. When his wife Myrtle appears, she seems to "walk through her husband as if her were a ghost." And when Wilson goes into the garage, he mingles "immediately with the cement color of the walls." This valley of ashes is a dumping ground where "ashes grow like wheat," but ashes are not fertile like wheat which they resemble only in distortion. It is a land of depletion, of spent phantoms, and death-in-life. Ironically perhaps, it is close to Independence Day when Carraway enters this forsaken area, as we know from his own words: "It was a few days before the Fourth of July, and a gray, scrawny Italian child was setting torpedoes in a row along the railroad track." The valley of ashes is the novel's second comment on the new republic, and the society it has brought forth into the world.

About the name of Wilson's wife Myrtle, there are a number of associations. In the ancient world, myrtle was sacred to Venus, but as to whether Fitzgerald knew of this association it is hard to say. What is more certain is that he has played Myrtle off against Daisy by giving her also the name of a flower or plant. More particularly, myrtle is a shrub, no part of which is easily distinguished from the mass. The most common variety of myrtle in America, moreover, is the "running myrtle," or periwinkle, whose green leaves grow very close to, could even be said to hug, the earth. In any case, there is nothing of the fay quality, or the elfin, in Myrtle—nothing of the diminutive and frail and graceful. She is captured with comic effect in her first appearance: "In a moment the thickish figure of a woman blocked out the light from the office door." It is noted that she has "rather wide hips"; and in a sense, she is the heavy-hipped Venus of the valley of ashes. "Her face...contained no facet or gleam of beauty, but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering." She boards the train as Tom and Carraway do, joining them when they arrive at the station in New York. Before they take a cab to the Washington Heights apartment Buchanan maintains for her, Myrtle buys a puppy "of an indeterminate breed" (an Airdale with white feet!), an incident which suggests Tom's "buying" Myrtle for his amusement.

The apartment has an atmosphere that is peculiar. "The living-room," Carraway comments, "was crowded to the doors with a set of

tapestried furniture entirely too large for it, so that to move about was to stumble continually over scenes of ladies swinging in the garden of Versailles." These Watteaulike tapestried scenes set the tone of the "love nest," of Myrtle's movie-magazine notion of "romance." Lying about, too, and also making their comment, are copies of *Town Tattle* and gossip magazines. Everything about the apartment has a quality of strangeness. Myrtle's sister, for example, has a "solid, sticky bob of red hair, and a complexion powdered milky white," and has thus something of a clown's appearance, underscoring the idea of mockery which runs through the scene. One notices, too, many oddly blurring impressions, which are part of the concern in the chapter with seeing, or with being unable to see, with vision and sightlessness. Figuring appropriately in this scene is Chester McKee, a photographer who confides that he is in "the artistic game." If the function of the artist is to achieve a vision underlying the inchoate material of reality, McKee is the artist *manque* who records literal surfaces, without a sense of what they mean. Of his wife, described as "shrill, languid, handsome, and horrible," he has taken one hundred and twenty seven photographs.

Myrtle's personality, as it is developed by Fitzgerald, has special interest for this scene. What she is like has been suggested on her first appearance in the fact that she wears "a spotted dress of dark blue crepe-de-chine" at the garage. A woman might wear a sheer crepe-de-chine dress at an early evening cocktail party, or at formal occasions, but she would not, under ordinary conditions, wear crepe-de-chine in the afternoon, and not at a garage. In this, we see that she pretends to, and has some vulgar idea of, distinction. At the station in New York, she lets four cabs pass before selecting one that is painted lavender, and when they reach the apartment building in Washington Heights, Fitzgerald tells us that she "went haughtily in." "The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage," Fitzgerald remarks, "was converted into an impressive hauteur." In this, one remembers the scene in *The Beautiful and Damned* of the "brummagem cabaret," where the young woman with violets on her hat pretends to belong to a higher social class, and then the others in the room are all seen to be pretending in the same way. It is as if the imagination of the middle class could take no other form, or reach toward the ideal no further than, say, the hope of a showier dress or house. In the course of this brief chapter, in fact, Myrtle manages to change her dress three times. "Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment until she seems to be "revolving on a noisy creaking pivot"—an image that suggests something on show, something wooden, overburdened, and barely functioning. "The room rang full of her artificial laughter."

Myrtle's representations to gentility are also shared by Mrs. McKee. They imagine themselves as being distinguished from the herd. " 'I almost made a mistake, too,' (Mrs. McKee) declared vigorously. 'I almost married a little kike who'd been after me for years. I knew he was below me. Everybody kept saying to me: 'Lucille, that man's 'way below you!' But if I hadn't met Chester, he'd of got me sure.' " Similarly, Myrtle

queens it over Mrs. McKee as she announces that she is going to give her the dress she is wearing, when she is ready to discard it. There is an extremely comic moment when, in referring to men, Myrtle remarks that "all they think of is money." It is comic because Myrtle is imagining herself as the big consumer, whose day is taken up with purchases at fashionable shops. "I'm going to make a list," she says, "of all the things I've got to get. A massage and a wave, and a collar for the dog, and one of those cute little ash trays where you touch a spring, and a wreath with a black silk bow for mother's grave that will last all summer. I got to write down a list so I won't forget all the things I got to do." In her notion of leisured wealth, Myrtle is mocked by the juxtaposition of this chapter with the first one, where we have already observed leisured wealth in Daisy and Miss Baker.

Myrtle's pretensions collapse suddenly when, "with a short deft movement," Tom breaks her nose. The scene had been building steadily toward this climax, as in the smoke and haze which begins to dim everyone's vision in the apartment. "The little dog was sitting on the table looking with blind eyes through the smoke, and from time to time groaning faintly." This haze of cigarette smoke insinuates the theme of the valley of ashes, and joins together in an unbroken logic the two scenes of the chapter. People now stumble confusedly through the smoke while there is heard "high over the confusion a long broken wail of pain." Myrtle is now lying on a couch, bleeding profusely, while the others attempt to spread copies of *Town Tattle* over the tapestry scenes of Versailles. In this telescoped detail, we are aware of the contrast between the court of Versailles, with its formality, elegance, and regal associations, as well as its court romances and love intrigues, and the squalid version of a love intrigue which we have been witnessing. It is this kind of detail, emphasizing through historical contrast the staleness of the contemporary moment, that one finds in Eliot's "The Waste Land"; but not even in Eliot is the cameo effect of this detail achieved with greater skill.

The apartment sequence "freezes" a moment of time, and its implications. Its implications are several, for this "love nest," and Tom's affair with a married woman will be played off against Gatsby's with Daisy. But we can already see that Tom's affair is absent of all imagination, is goatish and based purely upon physical lust, while Gatsby's is to be otherwise. The whole scene at the apartment deals in failure and casualties, not the least of them the wife-dominated photographer Chester McKee. As he first appears, we notice that he has apparently just been shaving, for he has a "spot of white lather on his cheekbone," a detail that makes Chester seem like an ineffectual little man. Ironically, near the close of the scene, we view him "asleep on a chair with his fists clenched in his lap, like the photograph of a man of action." Carraway sees him to his apartment, and practically tucks him into bed. Sitting up in bed, rather like a child with his picture book, McKee shows Carraway his photographs, which have no meaning, unless they mean that he is at many removes from a real and vigorous

engagement with life. Failed in manhood and imagination, McKee is a small figure in relief, against the exuberant imagination of Gatsby, who is to dominate the following chapter.

The social occasion of chapter three forms a contrast in many ways with those of chapters one and two. The dinner party at East Egg, for example, was exclusive and limited to a few, but Gatsby's party has a vast scale, and is open to "the world and its mistress." Gatsby's house, "a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy," also declares its owner; as an Hotel de Ville, it is a town or city hall, and thus underlines the idea of Gatsby's "inclusiveness" rather than exclusion. (The suggestion of inclusiveness is also quietly present in the volumes of *Stoddard's Lectures*, the travel books that take in the entire world, which adorn Gatsby's book shelves.) Although we do enter into Gatsby's house—at least into its gigantic "gothic" library—the scene is set for the most part on the forty acres of Gatsby's lawn and gardens, and takes place at night under the moon and the stars. We hear of his "glowing gardens" which are alive with music and hundreds of guests. "In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars." The scene evokes Gatsby's prodigality, his lack of pettiness, his indifference to cost.

The world of Jay Gatsby, associated with festival and the "play sense," could not be more different from the gray colorlessness of the valley of ashes, which had been witnessed immediately before. Gatsby's "enormous garden" is strung with colored lights, and is the scene of a "spectroscopic gayety"; it is a night world where magic and reality mingle. People come uninvited from everywhere, crowding onto his lawns, enjoying his seemingly endless flow of champagne, his buffets of pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold, and dinners served at different times of the night, while a huge orchestra plays the *Jazz History of the World*. It is a strange farrago of people, among whom float trays of cocktails, as the moon seems always to hover above the gardens. To Carraway, the party has an incredible gaudiness; yet he remarks: "I had taken two finger-bowls of champagne, and the scene changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound." At exactly this moment, he meets Jay Gatsby, who has created about him this raw, unassimilated, elemental splendor. Gatsby is "placed" here at this first party as having creative energy; he has the power to make others share his own vision, to make them participate in something outside of and larger than themselves. From the raw material of reality, he produces wonder, and it is this quality which he has almost singly and obsessively, and is his tragic flaw. That is why it is appropriate that Owl Eyes should be found in Gatsby's library, with his stupendous wonder at Gatsby's world, and its doubtful relation to reality. The night-gardens which glow with dreams are magical but unreal. Owl Eyes inspects the library shelves, amazed to find that the books are authentic, and then compares Gatsby with Belasco, who used real props to heighten stage illusion. The inner self of Gatsby, all of his implications, are carefully evoked through the use of scene, just as the sharp focus upon scene has served a similar purpose in the first two chapters.

Yet these three opening chapters do more than introduce the characters and their social settings, although they do that; they also intimate what is to follow. We first meet the Buchanans at their great shore-front estate, which by its appearance at the beginning has primacy as solid fact. It is approaching sunset, but the late afternoon sunlight is still strong. The Washington Heights apartment scene begins in the afternoon and fades into evening. It is late at night, however, well past midnight, when we first meet Gatsby and observe his party. There is thus a continuance in time, from afternoon to midnight, although the parties occur on different days, which bind the opening chapters together, and in doing so adumbrate the movement of the novel from light into darkness, from day into night. They embody, too, the oppositions of sunlight and moonlight, the strong sunlight of the East Egg estate which Fitzgerald has identified with reality, and the moonlight of Gatsby's party that is identified with dream. The chapters are linked together in another way, also, by the motif of confusion which runs through them all. Its source is located, significantly, with the Buchanans (for they preside over this world, and introduce the theme of money). In the opening scene, the telephone call shatters brittle appearances and the scene ends with a feeling of confusion and disgust on the part of Carraway that will be enacted later on a larger scale. In the apartment scene, a sordid confusion follows the love tryst that leaves Myrtle broken and bleeding, prefiguring her role in the novel as victim, her life to be violently extinguished by Daisy, as Gatsby's is to be, through Wilson, by Tom. The third version of confusion appears again in the chapter devoted to Gatsby, in the procession of stalled cars, and the honking of their horns, on Gatsby's drive; but from this Gatsby is aloof, as he stands under the moon in an imposing isolation, gesturing farewell that is like the signalling of the role he is to play in the novel. The whole plot of *The Great Gatsby* has thus been foreshadowed in its three opening chapters.

What is more, the theme of the novel has already been expressed in the opening. At the beginning, Carraway explains that he has come East to work in investment securities, and thus introduces the subject of money with which the novel is so much concerned. It is money for which the Buchanans and East Egg stand, and Fitzgerald is at pains to show its effect upon their lives. What one notices about Buchanan, for example, is the connection established between his wealth and his restlessness. As Carraway arrives, Buchanan talks to him on his porch, "his eyes flashing about restlessly." Later they go into the living-room, where he seems to "hover restlessly about." This attitude is characteristic of the social set to which Tom and Daisy belong. Before he goes to see the Buchanans for the first time, Carraway comments: "Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together." Jordan Baker is also restless and nomadic. In the opening scene, Carraway remembers that her "pessing contemptuous expression" had looked out at him from "rotogravure pictures of

the sporting life at Asheville and Hot Springs and Palm Beach." Buchanan and Miss Baker are importantly associated with sport (he with polo, she with golf), and both lack real commitments to other people.

More intelligent, more graceful than Tom, Daisy is nevertheless no deeper as a person than her husband. We see this in the opening scene in which she tells Carraway how disillusioned she feels. "The instant her voice broke off," Carraway says, "ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributary emotion from me. I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face, as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged."

The "secret society" to which Tom and Daisy belong, the money that stands behind them, has conditioned them to regard other people on unequal terms. In the opening where Carraway says that Buchanan "compelled" him from the living-room "as though he were moving a checker to another square," Fitzgerald intimates not only that Tom is peremptory, but also that he sees people as part of an amusement or pastime game. This is exactly the nature of Tom's relationship to Myrtle, which is to cost Myrtle her life. At the end, Tom says that when he gave up the flat, and "saw that damn box of dog biscuits there on the sideboard, I sat down and cried like a baby," and the reader is apt to smile at this maudlin pretense of a grief that is not felt. It is in this that Daisy is like Tom, insofar as her romance with Gatsby is, at bottom, an amusement—for which Gatsby is to pay dearly.

The Buchanans's set reflects the corrupting effect of money upon values (indeed, the Buchanans believe in nothing); but Fitzgerald has also closely observed its effect, manifested in a different form, in the other social spheres of the novel. One sees it at West Egg in Gatsby's guests who, conditioned by money values, live for momentary things. Gatsby's parties reek of money, but in his case, it is money given away, and hence it is not money that matters to him but the romance that beckons beyond it. With his guests, the parties are an end in themselves. Money-centered, they live in the volatile, momentary, changing world of time. The period of Gatsby's party, in the third chapter, has been strongly evoked, and in its garish opulence, in allusions like that of the girl mistaken for Gilda Gray's understudy, make one think of the *Follies*, and of Ziegfeld who "glorified the American girl" by making her the glamorous object of all desire; and in this, and the values or lack of them that go with it, one sees Gatsby rooted in his era, and sharing its illusions. Ziegfeld's girls were fantasy or "dream" creations, fashioned out of money, and offering no more substantial fulfillment of the dreams Ziegfeld sold to the public than Daisy Fay is to provide Gatsby.

In Gatsby's gardens, one finds all three together—money and girls and dreams. During the party in chapter three, Carraway remarks: "I

was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid, and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were at least agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key." Without a doubt, the hungry Englishmen are right; money is all around them. And in the midst of this "many-keyed, many-colored commotion," so are girls:

> Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the center of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the continually changing light.

This spectacle of the dubious and ephemeral glamour on his lawn immediately identifies Gatsby in his folly. Quickly enough its glamour dissolves into anticlimax, as in the case of the girl who sings weepingly, her mascara trickling down her cheeks so that she could sing "the notes on her face"; and the men who have to return their wives "lifted, kicking" to their automobiles. In the next chapter, Fitzgerald will introduce some of the guests by name, and we will see how disordered and grotesque their fates have been. But the disorder has already been sounded at the first party, which ends literally in confusion. The relation between money and restless, aimless impulse, which one observed in the Buchanans has a correspondence in Gatsby's guests, their lives conditioned by a money culture.

At a social level below West Egg, in the valley of ashes, the central importance of money also obtains. Indeed, the presence which broods over it is a commercial advertisement taking the form of the faded eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. "Evidently," Fitzgerald comments, "some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank himself down into eternal blindness." The oculist's presence, however, presides over a land where nothing can be clearly discerned. George Wilson has his meager business there, in bourgeois fashion the Wilsons live over their garage; they have little money, and small dreams, all of them conditioned by money. In the opening chapters on East and West Egg, there are important references to gardens, but in the valley of ashes there are only "grotesque gardens" of ashes, which express its dearth of imagination, energy, and joy.

In the Washington Heights apartment scene in chapter two, Myrtle Wilson has lying about a volume entitled *Simon Called Peter*, which was, in point of fact, a best-selling book in 1922. Written by Robert Keable, it was the story of a young clergyman, who went through World War I as a chaplain, and in doing so lost his faith in the Church. *Simon Called Peter* is a reminder of the loss of faith that has overtaken a whole world, in which Myrtle appears as a small but exemplary figure, arrayed

in a spotted dress of crepe-de-chine by the dumping ground that is the metaphor of her life. Capable of dreaming only of dresses and gimcracks, her imagination formed by movie magazine romance that leads merely to a desperate and miserable death, she is the waste product of a commercial culture.

Thus, on all three social levels representing the upper, upper middle, and middle-to-lower classes, money is the determining metaphor of existence. Fitzgerald has carefully demonstrated its distinct nature and effect on each level, and thus has affected the reader's reaction to the society depicted far more persuasively than any mere generalization could have done. By the end of the three opening chapters, Fitzgerald has *already* drawn the reader's attention to the destructive effect of money on each level of this society; has shown its effect to be like that of an acid, corroding idealism and purpose; has shown this effect to operate from top to bottom. The theme of *The Great Gatsby* is not articulated until the last paragraph of the work, but rarely has a novel's substance been so intimated in its opening section as in this one.

Fulton

Adolescent Literature Comes of Age

by Robert F. Mehl, Jr.

There has been a quiet revolution going on over the past thirty years that only a few teachers, apparently, are aware of. It is one that all teachers should become acquainted with because it is vitally important in making readers out of our secondary students. That revolution, or to be more precise, that evolution, is in the area of adolescent literature which is defined as literature written for young adult readers to serve as a bridge between children's stories and adult literature.

If we look back not too many years, literature written specifically for this age group did not exist with one exception, the endless series books delineating the adventures of super-kids like Tom Swift and Nancy Drew. On the other hand, well meaning adults and teachers designated a number of adult books as suitable for young readers because they were about young people, or animals, or belonged to that not yet quite respectable science fiction genre. *Tom Sawyer, The Last of the Mohicans, The Black Arrow* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* were among these adult choices. Any student of literature knows these and many others chosen were not written for young readers. Teachers knew these kinds of books did not excite adolescents, but blamed the adolescents.

Neither of these types of books really served the need that should have been obvious to teachers if not to adults. Subliterature came closest to some semblance of adolescent feelings and needs, but most teachers and librarians looked way down their noses at these books, and they still do. The adult perception of what kids *would like* to read was hopelessly entangled in what adults thought adolescents *should like* to read. Neither of these two extremes was anything adolescents could really relate to; they were not stories about adolescents' own particular kind of life. Neither type had any resemblance to teen life as teenagers were living it. Carlsen[1] points out the folly of shoving classics at teen readers too soon; it is simply that they do not really understand them and, more importantly for teachers, they develop a real dislike for reading. Instead of making readers of adolescents, teachers insured that they became non-readers.

But a revolution has occurred and adolescents are reading today like they never did before—in some schools! The development of the new adolescent literature has striking parallels with the development of literature in general and can be easily traced. In a sense adolescent literature is no longer controlled by well-meaning but bumbling adults—it is controlled by adolescents as readers and authors. This is as it should be. The teenager as the adult would like to have him—a

wishful-thinking view of innocence—is gone, if, indeed, he ever existed. In some of today's classrooms adolescents are eager to get into the new adolescent novels such as *The Pigman* and *The Outsiders*, as compared to the groans that greeted the advent of *Johnny Tremain* or *Tom Sawyer* or *Death Be Not Proud*. Relevancy and realism are the keynotes in today's adolescent literature and the young readers love it.

Although the development of adolescent literature parallels that of literature in general, it took only a few years as opposed to several centuries evolution for adult literature. Just as literature began with Greek epics and drama concerned with the high born, the important, kings and queens, so did adolescent literature first focus on teenagers of elevated status. It required a long time for the common man to emerge in literature as a hero; correspondingly it required a number of years before the common-man adolescent could recognize himself clearly in adolescent literature. Hutchinson[2] has traced very clearly the 50 year history of adolescent literature; it has its own periods to the present realistic world of teenagers. Adolescents, more than adults, seem to develop a genuine interest in reading, primarily when they can identify with the characters and situations they read of.

Before examining where adolescent literature is today, a brief look at where it has been may be in order. Adolescents plodded along through the 1920's and 1930's without any real attachment to reading, for they found very little depicting the problems of their own lives. The heavy hand of the adult was evident everywhere. The 1940's produced a minor renaissance. As unreal, as slanted as it was, books for teens began to look at the teen world through teen eyes. Writers during this decade made giant strides toward interesting adolescents in reading books.

As we look back to the 1940's we wonder that adolescents could accept the unreal teen world created for them. The point, of course, is that a significant change had taken place. Writers, skilled writers, were writing specifically for adolescents—teens were the protagonists—the stories were from an adolescent point of view, not an adult's. Early writers dealt with admittedly superficial teen concerns, but at least adolescents could begin to identify. *Seventeenth Summer*, the pacesetter written in 1942 for girls and written by a teenager depicted in detail how it felt to be a 17 year old girl trying to relate to boys in a social situation. It certainly is not real for today's readers, but it was a best-seller for young girls then. Early writers were still shackled by what they felt teens ought to be like, what adults wanted them to be, and possibly really believed them to be. A thinly veiled moralizing was evident, and often detected by the teens themselves. Value judgments ran rampant; all good people go to church, nice girls do not pet, going steady is not respectable, nice people do not drink, athletes are all good sportsmen, adults are always right. Moralizing was subtle but it was there. Middle class life, middle class values and problems were approached in terms of dating, school dances, sports contests, and higher education and careers, and were always successfully resolved. Teachers and parents seemed to be dictating what

was permissible to read about; the real world must remain hidden until later.

Boys got a break with two authors writing, finally, of their interests and experiences. Tunis capitalized on boys' interest in sports and Felsen depicted the relationship between boys and cars. Each presented well-written stories, convincing, recognizable characters, and a touch of realism. Tunis' sports stars and coaches were not flawless heroes, but often dishonest and poor sports. Sometimes they did not even win the crucial series game, but they usually did. Felsen's teens were skilled mechanics and drivers, but they did make errors of judgment, drive carelessly and kill on the highway; Felsen's girls were not "sweetsy-deetsy" but often calculating, cruel and selfish. Implicit in all of these stories was the gentle admonition to teens to behave, be honest, be kind, and to grow up to be good middle class Americans.

Girls were treated to stories like *Prom Trouble* (1954), *Going Steady* (1956) or *A Girl Can Dream* (1948). All families were nice, proper middle class WASPs living in small towns with loving though bumbling parents who really knew best. Girls dated, and even occasionally kissed. The concerns of life were dates, school dances, athletic contests, and communication problems with parents—all in a somewhat trivial frame of reference by today's standards. Boy/girl relationships are funny to today's readers—"O Rodney, you—you kissed me!", says the heroine of *Prom Trouble*. Everything was wholesome, innocent, safe and parent approved. Yet the seeds of realism were there; problems of teen and sibling rivalry were examined, of teen uncertainty and feelings of self-worth, of understanding and communication with adults at home and in school. The problem was, of course, that not all or even most teens came from nice clean, secure middle class homes with both parents loving and supportive, and life does not proceed happily-ever-after all the time.

There were at this time really two kinds of adolescent books, those for boys and those for girls, with more girl stories available than boy stories. Reading was clearly sexist—boys would never read girls books, although girls often would read boys books. It is amazing how few teachers perceived this phenomenon. The picture of adolescent life shown through the 1950's was superficial, distorted and simply a false representation of adolescence. Yet there was enough of a grain of realism to which young adults could respond and relate. Adults can largely be held responsible for this inadequate view of the world of teenagers. Adults thought that the most important problems teens had were proms, dates, cars, games, and apparently would not admit or did not want to admit that adolescents had serious problems.

Two incidents in the 1950's had a major impact on adolescent literature that finally culminated in today's realistic novel. *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) showed the emotional and mental tortures of a teenager on a real gut level, and a more honestly realistic language appeared in a story of adolescence. The other development, triggered by the Supreme Court decision on segregation was the increased awareness of black

Americans, and the tentative beginnings of a consideration of blacks and other ethnic minorities in adolescent literature.

Catcher was welcomed by many schools as a first-rate novel about a teenager. Problems immediately arose from parents who still chose to over-protect their children from the real world of violence and profanity, and *Catcher* has been the object of censorship attempts to this day. There were other problems with the book—it was still affluent middle class WASP America, including a private school setting. Teens liked reading of Holden's feelings but could not really relate to the rest.

Early attempts at depicting black teenagers for adolescent readers fell into many of the same patterns as the other books. The families were middle class; parents were always there, happy and supportive. The focus at this time was integration, and the locale the local school in a small town. To suggest that the real trauma of early black/white confrontation comes through in these books simply is not accurate. To black readers they were almost meaningless, reality was so distorted. The picture is at best of mild hazing and eventual success after racism had run its course. Covers of some of these early novels are revealing. Both *Julie's Heritage* (1957) and *Mary Jane* (1959) portray what can only be described as dark complected WASPs. Part of the problem was undoubtedly that many of these stories were written by whites as were the two above. A difference can be detected in *Southtown* (1958) by a black author. Life in the South with its terrors, violence, intimidation and poverty for blacks is rather realistically portrayed. Yet, the values and orientation are still essentially middle class white American, and the ending is happy. Hentoff, one writer who could have told it like it was, stated that in *Jazz Country* (1965) he purposely diluted the racial element; he felt the true picture would not have been acceptable.

Another important influence indirectly channeling adolescent literature toward realism has been the mass media. Both parents and adolescents now have the real world no farther away than the TV set. Kids know what is going on in the world and parents know they know it. It is useless to try to hide reality or to protect teens from violence, racism, death, sex, or drugs. They are surrounded by media presenting in detail the sordid as well as the beautiful aspects of life. The knowledge explosion has its counterpart in the schools themselves today in social studies classes which now critically examine the fabric of American life.

Kids, then, are in touch with reality today; it is an exciting world and adolescent literature is every bit as exciting as adult literature. Teens can no longer relate to the simplicities of *Seventeenth Summer* or *Hot Rod*. They will no longer tolerate books promoting adult "values"; they want real stories of people like themselves who have real problems. The false picture of life, the didactic, the stereotyped sex roles, the super ego adolescent—none of this will do. Teens simply will not be satisfied with the novels of the 40's and 50's.

The turning point in adolescent literature occurred in the 1960's. Authors moved from the minor problems of sports, dates, cars and

dances to the problems teens really were concerned about—parents, school, drugs, sex, racism. And a wonderful thing is happening in many schools—adolescents are liking to read. They are looking forward to reading in class and in the library. No longer need they groan at teacher/adult selected and approved irrelevant books. The old literary sexual segregation of boys' books and girls' books is disappearing, and a new breed of adolescent novel is beginning to appear—the book that is non-sexist, that is not oriented or directed exclusively to boys or girls but is, like adult fiction, directed to all readers. The very popular *The Pigman* is such a novel, and the current hit with teens, *Dinkey Hocker Shoots Smack* (1972), is another.

It is time for teachers to make the acquaintance of the new adolescent literature, it is past time to get it into your classroom. Librarians are at fault for not advising teachers, but teachers are primarily at fault for not advising themselves and for refusing to give up old favorites—theirs, not the kids'!

The new authors are tuned-in to the kids, and the teens are tuning-in to their books. Susan Hinton, author of *The Outsiders* (1967), one of the most successful books introduced into the classroom, has strong feelings about books for adolescents. If books are about teenagers, they should ring true, be with it; teenagers know they are with it, but books for them generally are not, she states. Her books deal realistically with the problems of living in the city and draw heavily from her own recent teenage experience. Frank Bonham, a master storyteller for teens, sees adolescents as uncertain, impassioned, idealistic, sensitive, as well as crude, cruel and impulsive. His novels reflect this realistic assessment. Bonham has contributed several fine ethnic novels, perhaps the best of which is *Durango Street* (1965), a vivid view of black ghetto life, and a book also adopted in many schools. In other books he deals with the problems of Chicanos, Indians, Puerto Ricans and again Blacks.

The new adolescent novels tell it like it is and the adolescent readers love it because they can identify and find these books relevant to their needs and interests. Stanek[3] reported, based on a study, that the number one problem for adolescents is getting along with parents, and the number two problem is getting along in school and with teachers. Zindel's novels deal realistically and effectively with both of these problems, as do the novels of Everly, Wojciechowska, Kerr, Platt and others. Sex and pregnancy are the focus of *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* (1967), *My Darling, My Hamburger* (1969), *Bonnie Jo, Go Home* (1972) and *Phoebe* (1970). Drugs are the concern of *Tuned Out* (1968), *Escape From Nowhere* (1969) and *Go Ask Alice* (1971). Mental illness is depicted in *Lisa Bright and Dark* (1969), *The Boy Who Could Make Himself Disappear* (1968) and *The Phaedra Complex* (1971). A realistically described look at the Black teenage experience occurs in *Durango Street* (1965) *The Cool World* (1959), *His Own Where* (1972), and in *Teacup Full of Roses* (1973). The aforementioned books are a small but representative selection of outstanding novels that might provide a good starting place

for teachers. Alcoholism, poverty, divorce, desertion, prejudice, violence, death, love, sensuality, hate, success, abortion, failure, politics, kindness, meanness—it is all there in adolescent literature today if teachers will take advantage of what is available. Most of these books are available in paperback and are short in length—two important considerations for teenage readers.

The present group of writers of adolescent fiction, if they are serious and conscientious, strive to recreate accurately and honestly human experience, to seek truth as they see it, and to avoid falsifying—all of which is to say they are literary artists. The critics and the censors are still with us, needless to say. Adults, teachers and librarians often still persist in looking at adolescent literature from an adult pedestal, applying adult literary standards to adolescent fiction. Many are incensed at the portrayal of adults in adolescent literature, feeling they are not depicted honestly or that the relationship between the generations is distorted. The view is not really relevant—adults and relationships with adults are depicted as adolescents perceive them—and this is the reality for the teen reader. It is too bad if adults do not like their portrait—perhaps they have something to learn from these books. It might be added that adolescents reading adult literature certainly find it hard to accept their portraits as seen by adults.

We teachers are still faced with the problem of uninformed, misguided censorship emanating from parents, community groups, self-appointed individuals and even teachers themselves. If more teachers become acquainted with the new adolescent novels and can tune-in to the real world of adolescents, we can become leaders in bringing meaningful reading, pleasurable reading, to teenagers, instead of reactionaries fighting a losing battle to maintain an irrelevant literature for adolescents. Yes, the new novels do contain all the four letter words, those very same words we, adults and teens alike, live with everyday; to exclude them would be false and the adolescent of today is no dummy. Only his adult mentors, often, are living in an unreal, pure world of "proper" language.

There are many, many recent adolescent books worthy of listing and detailed comment. It should be, it must be, each individual teacher's responsibility to become acquainted with this literature if teachers are ever to realize their goal of making reading meaningful and pleasurable for teenagers. Readers are our most important product. Adolescent literature has come a long way in the last 50 years. It has come of age, and accepts the responsibility of literature to explore the human condition and to tell what man is like.

Buffalo

FOOTNOTES

[1]Carlsen, G. Robert, **Books and the Teenage Reader**. Bantam, 1971.
[2]Hutchinson, Mgt., "Fifty Years of Young Adult Reading 1921-1971." **Top Of the News**, Nov. 1973.
[3]Stanek, Lou, "Adults and Adolescents: Ambivalence and Ambiguity." **School Library Journal**, Feb. 1974.

Teaching WALDEN

Bruce E. Miller

I

Any one student in a typical high school classroom, though like his classmates in many ways, in some important respects will also be different. His life, mind, and emotions are not likely to be quite the same as anyone else's. For instance, one student may have been dangerously ill and another never sick in his life; one may have many brothers and sisters and another none; one may be a first-rate athlete and another clumsy; one may spend time reading that another gives to repairing cars or playing tennis or watching television. Such peculiarities of background do not make any one of these students eccentric, but they do make them different—different from each other and different from people in general.

The differences can be worthwhile. The good athlete can tell the mechanically minded student how it feels to bat in a winning run in the last half of the ninth inning; the mechanic can tell the athlete what is wrong with his car. A good writer is able to exploit his difference from other people in such a way as to tell them something which they could not as easily have seen by themselves. Benjamin Franklin was different because of his superior shrewdness in practical affairs—and he wrote *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Edgar Allan Poe was different because of his slant towards the fantastic and morbid—and he wrote "A Casque of Amontillado."

How was Thoreau different from people generally, and what use did he make of that difference? Nearly everyone we know is surrounded most of his life by persons he loves and who love him. In childhood and youth most people have the benefit (and the irritation, too, of course) of close relations with their parents and their brothers and sisters. In most instances they become parents themselves later, and then their deepest interests center in their families—their husbands or wives and children. A large part of such a life has to be given to earning a living and advancing oneself in order to provide support and security to the family. Thoreau's case was different. Although his childhood was the usual kind, in early manhood, partly as a result of fate and also partly by choice, he began to lessen his contacts with others and to turn inward to himself. Thoreau never lost a capacity for friendship, but his deepest feelings were not directed out of himself, towards persons, but rather inward to his own consciousness.

As for the use which Thoreau made of this difference, he himself expresses it exactly:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

From his own particular vantage point—alone but not lonely, thoughtful, introspective, and keenly observant—Thoreau was able to perceive in life qualities which most people ignore because of their involvement in supporting and loving their families and in "getting ahead," activities which Thoreau passed by after his youth. To a large extent *Walden* is about just those qualities. It deals with the life of nature—a great battle of ants, the playfulness of a loon, the silent and steady growth of plants, the gradual changing of the seasons—and with the thoughts which Thoreau's particular situation suggested about the right place for humans to take in the world.

In reading Thoreau two extremes are possible, and both of them are wrong. One extreme is to read him submissively, to accept without question all his statements, even those which contradict our own experience, and to see no weaknesses in his viewpoint. The other extreme is to read him with indifference to his beliefs, to suppose that since his life was not the same as ours he has nothing to say to us. These extremes are wrong for the same reason: they prevent us from growing and learning by comparing our experience with another's.

Thoreau's particular kind of life suggested to him ideas which may appear strange to us at first but which often will modify our own opinions if we will let them. For instance, Thoreau once met a man who had to do hard physical work almost every waking moment just to provide himself with food. Thoreau remarked that if the man cut down his work load he would require less food, thus saving enough energy and expense to make up for the loss of wages. At first the idea may seem absurd, but perhaps we can apply it to our own lives. Probably we can all remember wasting money on purchases that were not worth the time and energy that were lost in earning the money in the first place.

We should begin reading Thoreau by realizing that his differences from ourselves helped him to see some aspects of life more clearly than we can see them and yet obscurred for him some other aspects. Then we ought to look for the ideas that we can learn from him, but we should also be on guard against ideas that, good as they were for him in his life, do not apply as well to ours. If we read Thoreau in this way, we shall be reading in the same spirit in which he wrote—critically. "Perhaps," Thoreau wrote of *Walden*, "these pages are particularly addressed to poor students. As for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them."

II

Thoreau's universality is a help to the teacher in preparing interesting assignments and lessons. Since in *Walden* Thoreau writes of experiences which are common to most people, activities which should enrich the students' reading are not far to seek. Out of the many activities which are possible, the best ones will be those which both interest the student and also increase his understanding of Thoreau's mind. In student essays growing out of *Walden* a broad range is possible, both of subject and difficulty. Especially able students might write essays dealing with Thoreau's temperament, using as source material Thoreau's descriptions of himself in *Walden*; or they might study Thoreau's preference for inner direction over outer direction, perhaps focusing the essay by asking what kind of person would be able to apply consistently in his own behavior Thoreau's notion of a good life. Students of average ability might write essays on the economics of *Walden*, estimating the amount of money which would be necessary, if one attempted the same Spartan regimen which Thoreau followed, to duplicate in the 1970's the kind of life which Thoreau led in 1845-1847 at Walden. A more speculative kind of essay, but one which might challenge the average student, could ask what benefits would result from the life of comparative solitude which Thoreau arranged for himself in his famous experiment. Students who have little ability to organize ideas into orderly compositions can write descriptions; *Walden* furnishes excellent examples of descriptions of both animals and scenery and shows that wealth of detail can make interesting such a simple activity as hoeing or looking down into an ice-covered lake.

Many useful projects—both individual and group—are possible. Pictures of the New England countryside might be collected to illustrate Thoreau's visual imagery (Magnificent photographs by Herbert Wendell Gleason appear in *The Illustrated Walden* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973].), and students who have aptitude in drawing might make sketches of scenes and persons in *Walden* or illustrated maps of the Concord vicinity, which could then be examined for accuracy by the whole class, thus becoming an exercise in exact visualization. Thoreau's precisely detailed expenditures could lead to analysis of student budgeting. Students might keep detailed accounts of their expenses for a week; then some of these lists could be compared with each other and with Thoreau's and thus stimulate discussion, and perhaps essays, concerning the values which students attach to various activities. (*E. g.*, is attending a professional boxing match worth the money that goes into it? If one's financial situation forces a choice between a used car and a summer holiday, on what grounds does one prefer the one over the other? What are the respective arguments either for getting a summer job to make money or for living so economically that the money is unnecessary?)

With Thoreau it should be possible to p an classroom discussions which are interesting in themselves and at the same time relevant to the

work. Some of the projects already listed might well lead to profitable discussion in class. Thoreau's emphasis upon the development of the single, separate man, considered apart from his society, reflects a point of view radically different from the modern endorsement of socialized development, and it is a position which should be carefully examined both for its merits and its shortcomings. These are questions which will help eleventh or twelfth grade students to deal with it: Was Thoreau a selfish man? Does his writing give any evidence to show that Thoreau was too preoccupied with himself to form close relations with others? Does he think of others as much as one ought? Does Thoreau have any goals in life that go beyond himself? Do most people? (Self-deception on this point is easy, and students may be able to give examples.)

Thoreau's preference for the utmost simplicity in the physical details of living can also be matter for good discussion, especially so if the student can see the practical applications to his own life that are possible. These leading questions should provoke discussion: If the average high school girl spent on her wardrobe only as much as is necessary to keep her warm and presentable, how much money would she have saved in a year? But *should* she attempt such savings? What are the advantages on either side? (In this connection the teacher may want to point out that conspicuous consumption is sometimes no more than a fruitless attempt to work out personality problems; students may be able to furnish examples.) What amount of physical goods is essential for happiness? (A car? How expensive a car? How much ego support can one get from his possessions without being sick?) In what instances is a wealthy man less happy than a poor man? What do we mean by *materialism*? (In fact, there are several meanings.) What may a person lose who thinks of nothing but material gain? Supposing that the things people set most store by are those which they are willing to spend their money for, what things in the world do you love most?

The teacher in his own classroom will, of course, take these questions as suggestions merely. He will certainly want to rephrase most of them for the level, interest, and personality of his own particular class. In addition, he will ask other questions and omit some of those given here. But these kinds of questions ought to lead to discussions about ethics and value, and several points in this connection will be in the teacher's mind. The first is that while most teachers feel they have no business prescribing values for their students, they would commonly agree that it is very much their business to help students become aware of their own values (which are often held unconsciously) and of other people's. Another point is that serious discussions about value, though rewarding, are also difficult. The teacher can cope with this difficulty by permitting a slow pace, for instance by allowing lapses into silence (not at all a thing to be feared or avoided in class discussions of literature) during which the students mull over a problem, or by assisting thought through dictating a question and giving students time to write out their answers. Finally, discussions about value that become arguments are, in the classroom at any rate, often unprofitable. But, on the other hand, an

exchange of ideas through which students see what are the different ethical views on a particular matter can be rewarding because it opens up new outlooks to the student and because it shows him that not all men value the same things in the same way. These objectives can best be attained if the discussions are kept for the most part to the descriptive level, to the consideration of the question why people think as they do.

Buffalo